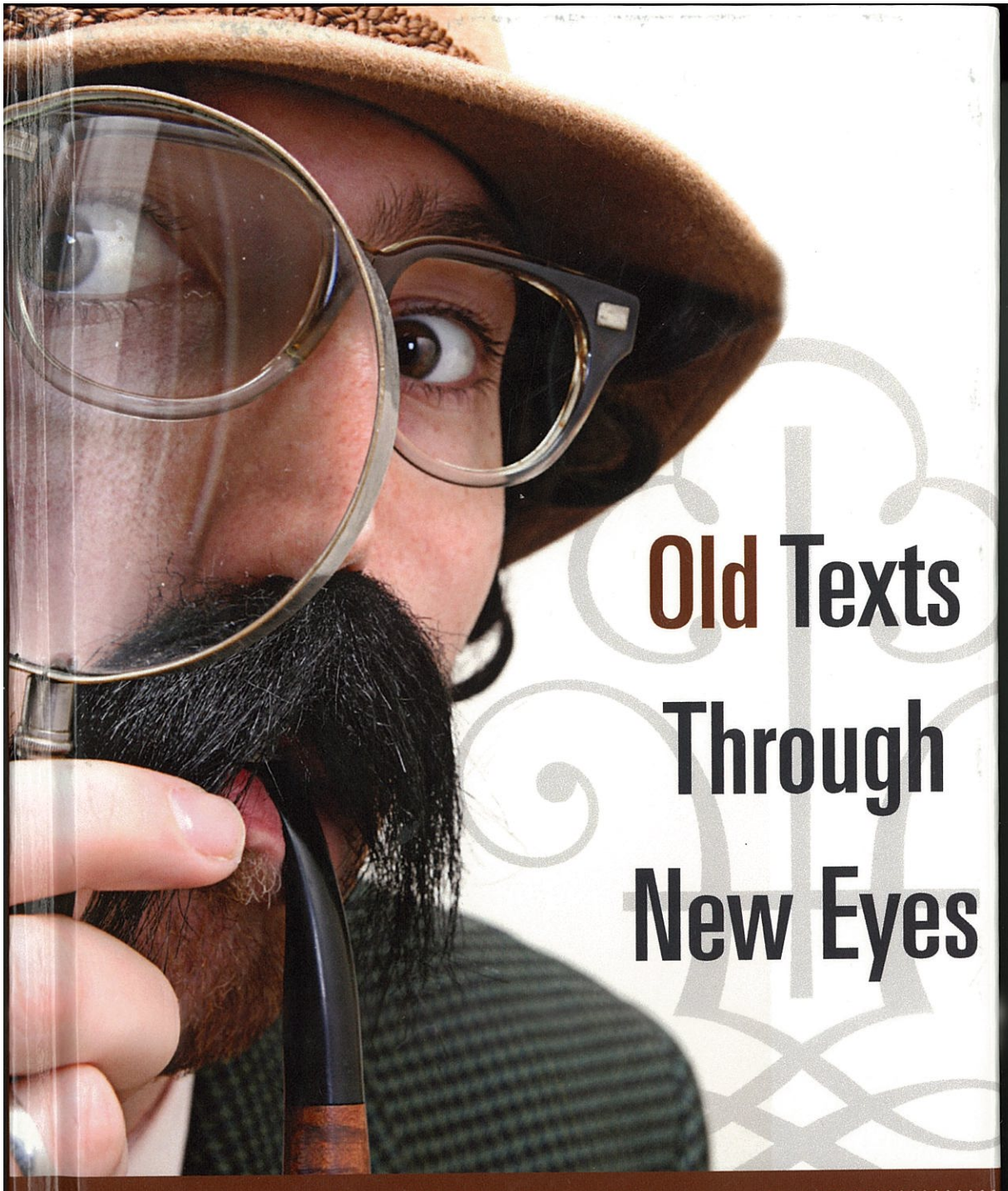


Old Texts Through New Eyes

Reexamination of Misunderstood Scriptures

Dallas R. Burdette

Old Texts Through New Eyes

Reexamination of
Misunderstood Scriptures

by

Dallas R. Burdette

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By Dallas Burdette

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Dedication to

First, I dedicate this book to my wife of fifty-two years, and to my children, Rachael Evans, Regina Burdette, Lavone Burdette, Allen Newton, and Donnie Newton. Also, I dedicate this book to my daughters-in-law—Debra Newton (1958-2013), Tara Newton, and Mindy Burdette.

Second, I also dedicate this book to my brother-in-law and sister-in-law, Bobby and Darlene Violette; my son-in-law and daughter, Doug and Rachael Evans; Marvin and Faith Wilson (1946-2014), my brother-in-law and sister; James (1941-2017) and Betty Hagan, and the New Covenant Fellowship (Montgomery, AL.) for their financial sacrifices, without which I could not have published this book.

Third, I also dedicate this book to Dr. Jimmy Crabtree, Dr James Albert, David Richardson (1928-2019), Shoney Taylor, and Katrina Burdette (1945-2020) who proofread and made suggestions in order to make this book more readable and understandable.

Fourth, I also dedicate this book to the members of the New Covenant Fellowship who encouraged me to put my writings into book form, and who, as mentioned above, also contributed financially for the publication.

Fifth, I also dedicate this book to Dr. Leroy Garrett (1918-2015) and Carl Ketcherside (1908-1989) who assisted me in my development of how to read the Word of God more accurately. They taught me that traditional opinions are not sacrosanct. Leroy and Carl prepared me to do justice to the biblical text in spite of long-held traditions. They challenged me to rethink and reinterpret what had been handed down to me from my forefathers. Prior to my encounter with these two men, the traditions of the church made it difficult for me to read the Word of God correctly.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the rich blessings that the Lord Jesus has bestowed upon my life. Since becoming a Christian in 1949, I have been guided by God through many changes that have led to personal growth and development. God in His mercy allowed me to enter Southern Christian University (now Amridge University) to begin in-depth studies that eventually concluded with the Doctor of Ministry degree from Erskine Theological Seminary.

Even though it is impossible to list all who have contributed to my spiritual growth, I am especially thankful to the late Dr. Rex Turner, Jr. (1945-2008), president of Amridge University until his death, who made available the opportunity for me to complete my B.A., M.S, M.Div., and D.Min. I also express my appreciation to Dr. Randall Bailey and Dr. Floyd Parker, professors at Faulkner University, for their efforts to prepare me toward earning my various degrees. Also, I am appreciative to Dr. Jimmy Crabtree, Dr. James Albert, David Richardson, Shoney Taylor, and my wife, Katrina Burdette (1945-2020), for their encouragement and suggestions about writing this book. They have worked with me on the preparation of this book through reading every chapter and making suggestions.

My wife encouraged me through the years to continue my studies for the glory of God. She supported me spiritually in order that I might share with others the things that I have learned so that I might help to lead others into a greater understanding of the awe and wonder of God's scheme of redemption in and through the finished work of Christ upon Calvary. I thank God that He has blessed me with one who truly loved God and desired the advancement of His kingdom.

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FOREWORD

For the past eighteen years it has been my privilege to proofread the writings of Dallas Burdette. He is a prolific writer and writes on a wide variety of biblical and related issues. He has written many sermons, essays, bulletin articles, eulogies, a book, and a doctoral Dissertation. These are all available on his website *freedominchrist.net*. In his first published book, *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (2008), Dallas gives a vivid account of his beginning efforts as a young preacher steeped in a legalistic and dogmatic setting. Early in life, Dallas memorized many Scriptures which he was able to quote eloquently, but without knowing the context for understanding the true meaning of those Scriptures. In time, Dallas began to see the need for developing a faith of his own, not just one handed down from his mentors. He deplored the fractured state of the church. This led to his going back to school at Alabama Christian School of Religion (now Amridge University) where he earned undergraduate and graduate degrees. He later completed the Doctor of Ministry Degree from Erskine Theological Seminary.

Dallas did not go to school to earn degrees, but to learn how to better understand the Word of God. He mastered the Hebrew and Greek languages, read widely from outstanding theologians, studied the art of Hermeneutics, and diligently searched the Scriptures themselves. Dallas has developed an extensive personal library of 30,000 volumes, which he generously shares with Amridge University. Dallas has not been content to buy books to let them gather dust on shelves. He has read, I am sure, more books than anyone I have ever personally known. When Dallas reads a book, you can tell he has been there, as the book is filled with highlighted passages, as well as neatly penciled marginal notes and references. His Bibles receive the same treatment.

Rising around 3:00 O'clock each morning for many years, Dallas spends several hours in Bible Study, either by himself or with friends who want to share in his knowledge. This volume, *Old Texts through New Eyes,* urges students of the Bible everywhere to go back to the Scriptures to learn the meaning of the author from the context. He cautions against finding isolated Scriptures that seem to support what one already believes. The reader of this book should read it in its entirety before passing judgment on it.

James F. Crabtree, Ed. D.
Montgomery, Al
January 15, 2009

INTRODUCTION

The theme of this book is a reexamination of long-held traditions that have divided God's family into warring factions. These twenty-two chapters seek to remove the difficulties of interpreting the Word of God in order that Christians may listen anew to the biblical text. Without thinking, many believers prune Scriptures in order to uphold their presuppositions about what they suppose a particular text teaches. This book is a call to God's children to reevaluate and reinterpret the various understandings handed down through the centuries. This in-depth study of misunderstood Scriptures questions the various readings that have been passed on by generations of interpreters. For many sincere followers of Christ, the "faith of the fathers" has become the watchword for the accepted view of the church. Hopefully, these chapters will remove many obstacles that stand in the way of interpreting the Word of God more faithfully.

If we are to assume responsibility in the way we read the Scriptures, we must be willing to lay aside preconceived ideas and reconsider the various renderings of isolated texts received from earlier generations. We must be willing to rethink and readjust our thinking concerning explanations passed on to the company of the redeemed by godly men and women. Many Christians have been indoctrinated through the churches of their childhood. Regrettably, we have been influenced by outside sources more than by the context of God's written Revelation.

My comments in the various chapters are not designed to slander Christian brothers and sisters or to accuse them of intentionally misinterpreting the Word of God. This book is intended to help believers to go back to the drawing board to see if what they have been taught is what the authors of Holy Scripture meant to convey. Even when we do not see eye-to-eye, we should not accuse one another of deception, or dishonesty. There is a difference between an honest mistake of the heart and rebellion against God. The title of this book, *Old Texts through New Eyes*, is calculated to encourage believers to go back to the text(s) to establish if what they have been taught is in agreement with the author's intentional meaning.

Dallas Burdette, D.Min.
Montgomery, AL
January 15, 2008
November 11, 2020

1

Relevance of the Old Testament

> The most wonderful thing about Christianity, which makes it absolutely unique among the religions of the earth, is, that it has what one may call a reflex history—a history before its actual history commenced—a life before its birth. Its history is composed of two separate periods, each of which is written in a separate volume, but not only do the two make one complete whole, but they stand in such relation to each other that the truth of the one is attested and demonstrated by the testimony of the other. Without the first, the second would be without foundation and unintelligible; without the second, the first would have no corner-stone to keep its sides together, and no headstone, which it absolutely needs to give it a finished and perfect appearance, and so seal it as the workmanship of Him Who is perfect in all His ways.[1]

For many Christians, the Old Testament writings belong to antiquity. As a result of this mindset, many saints no longer study these thirty-nine books. What relevance does the Old Testament have within the Christian community? Is the Old Testament an antiquated book that is no longer significant to Christians? Is it necessary for believers to study the Old Testament, as did the early church? Did the American Restoration Movement initiated by the Campbells reject the Old Testament? What is our attitude toward the Old Testament writings? The most crucial question we, as a body of believers, must consider in seeking a proper decision to this interrogation is: "What did the men who wrote the New Testament books think about the Old Testament?" To set the stage for this investigation, it is necessary to begin with Alexander Campbell (1788-1866).

ALEXANDER CAMPBELL

The question among evangelicals is not whether or not the Old Testament is inspired, but does the Old Testament have any significance for us today? Before considering the attitudes of the Apostles and other inspired men, how do we account for such a wholesale abandonment of the Old Testament within the Churches of Christ? Perhaps, a brief note of Alexander Campbell's beliefs on this subject will help to set the tone for our discussion.[2] For example, the attitudes of those in the Stone/Campbell Movement were influenced by a sermon preached by Alexander Campbell on the Law (1816).[3] It is this sermon that set the stage for the negative attitude within many Churches of Christ. Everett Ferguson (b. 1933) commented upon the significance of this sermon in an address to the Christian Conference, Abilene University, July 1982:

---

[1]David Baron, *Rays of Messiah's Glory: Christ in the Old Testament*, originally published in 1886 (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 13.

[2]Campbell was an early leader in the Second Great Awakening of the religious movement that has been referred to as the Restoration.

[3]See, Alexander Campbell, "Sermon on the Law" in C. A. Young, *Historical Documents Advocating Christian Union* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press Publishing Co., Inc., 1985), 217-282.

Alexander Campbell's "Sermon on the Law" has been generally regarded by the historians as a significant episode in the emergence of the Restoration Movement.[4]

Ferguson rightly calls attention to the impact upon the Stone/Campbell Movement, which impact has continued to the present day (2020). Even Alexander Campbell (1788-1866) credited this sermon to the beginning of the American Restoration Movement. As a result of this message on the Law, the Stone/Campbell Restoration Movement was launched. He attributed an eminent significance for his own participation in the Movement to this sermon. The following extract from Campbell may explain the significance of this speech:

> Although precisely thirty years this month since I delivered it, and some two or three years after my union with the Baptist denomination, the intelligent reader will discover in it the elements of things which have characterized all our writings on the subject of modern Christianity from that day to the present . . . . This unfortunate sermon afterward involved me in a seven years' war with some members of said Association, and became a matter of much debate. I found at least, however, that there was a principle at work in the plotters of said crusade, which Stephen assigns as the cause of the misfortunes of Joseph. It is, therefore, highly probable to my mind, that but for the persecution begun on the alleged heresy of this sermon, whether the present reformation had ever been advocated by me.[5]

Campbell stressed that he did not recognize the division of the Law into the three classifications, that is, (**1**) moral, (**2**) ceremonial, and (**3**) judicial. Since he did not recognize these three categorizations, he drew a sharp distinction between the so-called old and new covenants, that is to say, a distinction between the Old Testament books and the New Testament books. Alexander was not alone in this decision. His father also stressed this difference in 1809 in his *Declaration and Address.* Thomas Campbell (1763-1854) uses the following pregnant words to express this distinction:

> That although the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are inseparably connected, making together but one perfect and entire revelation of the Divine will, for the edification and salvation of the Church, and therefore in that respect cannot be separated; yet as to what directly and properly belongs to their immediate object, the New Testament is as perfect a constitution for the worship, discipline, and government of the New Testament Church, and as perfect a rule for the particular duties of its members, as the Old Testament was for the worship, discipline, and government of the Old Testament Church, and the particular duties of its members.[6]

As a result of their philosophy, they set the tenor for the neglect of the Old Testament books. It appears that this neglect for the Old Testament, at least in the Stone/Campbell Restoration Movement, may be due in part to the "Sermon on the Law" and the *Declaration and Address* (1809).[7] Thus, as a result of this emphasis, this concept became a focal point in the theology of the Movement. Part of their theology rests, so it seems, in not properly understanding the negative statements in the writings of Paul that grew out of the "new covenant" that God created through His Son Jesus Christ. Ferguson, Professor of Church History Emeritus at Abilene Christian University, also expresses the central focus of Campbell's position on the Law in his use of Romans and Galatians:

> Campbell in the "Sermon on the Law" works only with Paul, primarily Romans (from which he took his text) and secondarily Galatians and 2 Corinthians. He could have appealed also to Hebrews. One must remember that Paul had a special problem in mind, namely, Judaizers who were binding parts of the law of Moses on Gentile Christians as conditions of salvation, and, in applying Paul's teaching, this context must be kept in mind.[8]

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[4]Everett Ferguson, "Alexander Campbell's 'Sermon on the Law,' A Historical and Theological Examination," *Restoration Quarterly* 29, second quarter 1987: 71.

[5]Alexander Campbell, "Sermon on the Law," *Millennial Harbinger 3 (September 1846): 493.*

[6]See C. S. Young, *Historical Documents Advocating Christian Union* (reprint, Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 1985), 109.

[7]See C. A. Young, *Historical Documents Advocating Christian Union*, 27-216.

[8]Everett Ferguson, "Alexander Campbell's 'Sermon on the Law': A Historical and Theological Examination, *Restoration Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (Second Quarter 1987): 83.

It appears that Alexander Campbell did not consider the negative aspects of the Law in light of the Jewish controversy. How are we to interpret disapproving announcements about the Law? Does opposing testimony about the Law disannul the validity of the Law for us? Was Campbell correct in asserting that there is no distinction among the three classifications of the Law, namely, ceremonial, moral, and civil? Did Campbell examine carefully the positive statements about the Law in the Gospel of Matthew? Some of Campbell's arguments are sufficiently fragile that we are reluctant to let too much rest upon them. Ferguson is perfectly right when he writes, "Campbell does not in the Sermon deal with the rather different estimate of the Law to be found in Matthew."[9]

How do we react to the words of Peter in his First and Second correspondence to the believers in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1 Peter 1:1, 10-12; 2 Peter 1:19-21; see also 2 Timothy 3:10-17 and Matthew 5:17-18). If one desires to understand the Hebrew Scriptures and their relevance for the believer today, I highly recommend the following books by Don Preston: (1) Don K. Preston: *The End of the Law: Torah to Telos, The Passing of the Law of Moses,* Volume 1 (Ardmore, OK: Jadon Management, 2012) (2) Don K. Preston versus Kurt Simmons, *The End of Torah: At the Cross or AD 70: A Debate on When the Mosaic Law Passed Away* (Ardmore, OK: JaDon Management, 2011), and Don K. Preston, *AD 70: A Shadow of the 'Real' End?* (Ardmore, OK: JaDon Management, 2013). Without a knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures, we cannot understand eschatology in the New Covenant writings.

NEW TESTAMENT WRITERS AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

Christians are confronted with two issues concerning the relevance of the Old Testament: (1) Does the Old Testament have authority for believers today? and (2) How does one apply the Old Testament to the Christian community? The most common understanding about the Old Testament is that Christ nailed it to the Cross. In other words, He annulled or abrogated the Law—period. Thus, many saints do not read the Old Testament writings. Many Christians have adopted the position of Adolf Harnack (1851-1930)), German theologian and prominent church historian):

> To reject the Old Testament in the second century was a mistake the church rightly resisted; to retain it in the sixteenth century was a fate from which the Reformation could not escape; but still to preserve it in the nineteenth century as one of the canonical documents of Protestantism is the result of religious and ecclesiastical paralysis.[10]

Harnack's solution was summarily to reject the Old Testament. Even though Christians would not express their disapprobation of the Old Testament with his phraseology, nevertheless, it amounts to practically the same view. But these views were not unique with Harnack. In fact, in the second century, Marcion (c. 160) also rejected entirely the Old Testament from his Bible.[11] Marcion concluded that the God of the Old Testament could not be the God of the New Testament. We find difficulty in squaring Marcion's view with the facts. For instance, over three-fourths of the total Bible is found in the Old Testament. This point alone is sufficient ground to cause us to pause before rejecting this most extensive record of God's Revelation. Everett Ferguson aptly remarks:

> According to one count, there are 239 acknowledged quotations of the OT, introduced by some kind of formula, in the NT; there are 198 quotations not introduced by any formula; there are 1,167 instances of OT passages reworded or directly mentioned. This makes a total of 1,604 NT citations of 1,276 different OT passages. There are many allusions to the OT and borrowings of its phrases. Most of these passages represent a straightforward, literary use of the OT. The NT

[9] Ibid., 83.

[10] Adolf Harnack, *The Christian Church and the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 10, quoted in Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward Rediscovering The Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 14.

[11] Marcion's views are gleaned from Tertullian's five-book refutation, *Against Marcion*—written during the early part of the third century.

uses the old in many ways—for vocabulary and phraseology to express its own ideas, for illustration, for proof of its statements, for moral instruction, for predictions of the new situation. Each of these and other uses could be discussed, but suffice it to say that problems in the NT use of the Old should not obscure the tremendous indebtedness of the later canon to the older, nor should they make that entire usage more problematic than it is.[12]

Beginning with the New Testament, the permanent value of the Old Testament is repeatedly affirmed with explicit statements about its importance. For example, consider the words of Jesus on the Sermon on the Mount:

> Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. [18] I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. [19] Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. [20] For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:17-20)

Again, Paul sets forth the validity of the Old Testament in his epistle to the Romans:

> For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (Romans 15:4)

Once more, Paul zeros in on the legitimacy of the Old Testament in his letter to the Corinthians:

> These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. (1 Corinthians 10:11)

Or, consider Paul's admonition to Timothy:

> But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, [15]and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. [16]All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, [17] so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:14-17)

These Scripture citations are passages that many Christians have not come to grips with. What does it mean to say, "Whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:19)? How can the sacred writings be useful "for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (1 Timothy 3:16)? How can Jesus and Paul say these things if the Old Testament is no longer relevant? How can we understand eschatological statements in the New Testament without a knowledge of the Old Testament? Again, it is significant that when Paul wrote these words to Timothy, he had reference to the Old Testament. What did Paul mean when he encouraged Timothy to "continue in what you have learned" (2 Timothy 3:14)? The inclusion or exclusion of the Old Testament affects every area of theology. The author of Hebrews specifically wrote that the unity of the Old Testament and the New Testament were to be found in the same God, despite the later arguments of Marcion:

> In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, [2] but **in these <u>last days</u>** he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. (Hebrews 1:1-2)

[12]Everett Ferguson, "Christian Use of the Old Testament," in *The World and Literature of the Old Testament,* ed. John T. Willis (Austin: Sweet Publishing Co., 1979), 373.

How are we to interpret the "last days" without a knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures?[13] Believers during the Old Testament and New Testament eras shared the one and only God.

MORAL, CEREMONIAL, CIVIL

Part of the problem, so it seems to me, is a failure to consider the various aspects of the Law. This distinction is not generally advocated within the Churches of Christ. Why is this so? An answer to the problem lies partly in Alexander Campbell's position. Campbell did not make a distinction between the various aspects of the Law. But was he correct? Are the arguments for moral, ceremonial, or civil legitimate? Walter Kaiser (b. 1933), Professor of Old Testament and President of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts, very succinctly states this problem:

> It must be conceded that the OT contains parts that were indeed temporary and, therefore, time-bound by their very nature (e.g., the ceremonial and ritualistic laws and the once-for-all aspects of its historic episodes). But our contention is that there was also built-in warning with each of these temporary parts that alerted us to the fact that they would become obsolete. Accordingly, all the tabernacle instructions were given as a model, or "pattern" (Exod 25:9, 40; Heb 8:5), of the real, which remained separate from the ceremonial institutions themselves. Nevertheless, behind the temporal and historical lay a principle—a truth meant to outlive its temporal or historical illustration. Too frequently the church has incorrectly assumed that when it had seen the collapse of the temporal institution, it had also thereby witnessed the end of all truth or obligation to any undergirding principles that the institution or historical event illustrated for a former age.[14]

Perusals of the Old Testament Scriptures indicate the temporal nature of certain aspects, but, on the other hand, it is obvious that certain elements have abiding validity. The seven Feast Days in the Hebrew Scriptures were shadows of the coming Messiah. The Scriptures must give its own signals in distinguishing what is temporal, cultural, and historically conditioned. Is the moral Law of God temporal, cultural, or historically conditioned? How do we explain the many references in the New Testament to the Old Testament that speaks of the abiding force of the Law? How do we account for the eternal righteousness of the Law in the messianic age? For example, both Isaiah (739 BC) and Jeremiah (627 BC) speak of the abiding importance of the Law in the Christian age. If this is not the situation, then we wonder what Isaiah and Jeremiah refer to when they spoke of "the law" going forth from Jerusalem and "the law" being written upon the heart? Isaiah tells Israel:

> In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. 3 Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." **The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem**. (Isaiah 2:2-3)

Again, Jeremiah also speaks of the Law written on the hearts of God's people in the messianic age:

> "The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. 32 It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to[e] them,[f]" declares the LORD. 33 "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "**I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts**. I will be their God, and they will be my people. (Jeremiah 31:31-33)

Both of these citations are Messianic in nature. How do we reconcile these Scriptures with the current interpretation that the "law was nailed to the cross" in AD 33? Everything that the Hebrew Scriptures foretold

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[13] For an in-depth study of the "last days," see Don K. Preston, *The Last Days Identified* (Ardmore, OK: JaDon Management, 2004). I have read this book several times. I highly recommend this book for anyone who wishes to become acquainted with the Old Testament.

[14] Walter Kaiser, *Toward Rediscovering the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 24-25.

[e] Hebrew; Septuagint and Syriac / *and I turned away from*

[f] Or *was their master*

about the coming of the Messiah had to be fulfilled before the Law with its ceremonial aspects would cease, which occurred in AD 70.. Is it possible that we have misread the statements of Paul in his letters to the Ephesians (2:15-16) and Colossians (2:13-15), which seem to indicate, at least on surface reading, that the Law was nailed to the Cross?

Ephesians 2:14-16	Colossians 2:13-15
For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, [15] by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, [16] and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.	When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature,[b] God made you[c] alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, [14]having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. [15]And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. [D]

What does Paul teach by saying, "the law with its commandments and regulations"? What does Paul mean by announcing, "the law with its commandments and regulations" to the Colossians? We must be careful not to bring our theological heritage, our ecclesiastical traditions, our cultural norms, or our existential concerns to the Epistles as we read them. If our interpretation of these two Scripture citations makes the text mean something God did not intend, then we are abusing the text. Remember that the text serves as a window through which we can glance into a historical period. The following extract from Greg Bahnsen (1948-1995), philosopher and apologist, may explain these two Scripture citations (Ephesians 2:15-16 and Colossians 2:13-15) more clearly:

> The ceremonial observations no longer apply, but their meaning and intention have been eternally validated. The earlier sacrificial ritual was a foreshadow pointing to Christ (Heb. 10:1), and no repetition of a mere shadow can amount to the substantial reality! That which is the foundation of the new economy, in which the outward performance of the ceremonial ritual is not observed, is the obedience of Christ (cf. Heb. 10:8 f.). His obedience makes it no longer necessary for us to obey the ceremonial law in the way which the saints living in the period of expectation did. Ephesians 2:14-16 says that Christ has put the principle of commandments contained in ordinances "out of gear." Christ has broken down the barrier between Jews and Gentiles of which the dividing wall in the temple was the symbol. It should be quite clear that the law which represents enmity and separation between Jews and Gentiles is the ceremonial law, for the moral law does not distinguish between these groups (all men are responsible to the moral law and are condemned under it: Rom. 1-3). It is this ceremonial system which Christ has made ineffective.[15]

In seeking to draw attention to neglected truths, repetition is unavoidable. It is a popular error to suppose that "commandments contained in ordinances" refers to the Law as a whole. But it seems that the stipulations that Paul addresses has to do with "the law of commandments contained in ordinances," that is to say, the principle, order, policy, or system of commandments, not the moral law of God. In other words, the "commandments contained in ordinances" are "decrees," thus, referring to the ceremonial Law. Even in Colossians 2:14, the "ordinances" are the "shadow of things to come" (2:17), and in verses 11 and 16 specific ceremonial illustrations are given.

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[b] Or *your flesh*

[c] Some manuscripts *us*

[15]Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (New Jersey: Presbyterian Publishing Co., 1984), 209-10.

SERMON ON THE MOUNT

The Sermon on the Mount is quoted by many Christians to substantiate the abandonment of the Old Testament. Part of the confusion lies within the phrases, "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago" (Matthew 5:21) and "But I tell you" (Matthew 5:22). The Greek text is: **Ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη τοῖς ἀρχαίοις** (*Ēkousate hoti errethē tois archaiois*,[16] "You heard that it was said to the ancients," (Mathew 5:21), and **ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν** (*egō de legō hymin*),[17] "But I say to you" (Matthew 5:22). The phrase, "You heard that it was said to the ancients" is not what the Law said, but rather, the interpretations placed upon the Law by its religious leaders. Jesus sought to correct the erroneous explanations piled upon the Law through the tradition of the elders; He did this by calling attention with the phrase, "But I say to you."

To illustrate the above statement, a cursory look into Jesus' temptation by Satan should clarify the distinction. For example, in the preceding chapter (Matthew 4), Jesus' confrontation with Satan resulted in His quoting the Old Testament. Observe that Jesus, in His response to Satan, did not say, "You heard that it was said to the ancients," but rather, "It is written" (**γέγραπται**, *gegraptai*) [Matthew 4:4]. On the one hand, the first statement (Matthew 5:21) refers to the forefathers, but, on the other hand, the second statement (Matthew 4:4) refers to the *written Revelation* of God through the prophets.

We must learn to reevaluate and reinterpret what has been handed down from generation to generation. Above all, we should never make a decision on what we would like the passage to say. We should seek to be faithful to the way in which the Holy Spirit structured the original text. It is only through a careful reading of the text itself that we can understand the original meaning of the text without reading into it our own ideas drawn from the present. **Proof-texting has no place in exegesis**. Verses are only a part of a larger context. The Scriptures in Ephesians and Colossians must be interpreted in light of the larger context, that is, the whole of God's Revelation. For example, the preceding Scriptures must be interpreted in light of the Sermon on the Mount.

A brief analysis of certain aspects of the Sermon on the Mount will help to shed light on Jesus' viewpoint concerning the validity or worthlessness of the Law. Did Jesus uphold the Law or repudiate the Law? Did Jesus abolish the Law of Moses and give another law that is more demanding than Moses' Law? What can we learn from the Sermon on the Mount concerning Jesus' position toward the Law? Does this Sermon invalidate the Law?

As we move toward the Sermon on the Mount, we must decide, based upon the context, whether or not Jesus gave a new law or simply explained the original intent of His Law as it was revealed to Moses. A lot will depend upon the application that we attach to the words, "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago," and "But I tell you." Was there a contrast between Moses and Jesus' teaching? Perhaps, John R. W. Stott (1921-2011), evangelical Anglican, preacher, teacher, author, and editor—authored fifty books, cogently expresses this best:

> It is widely supposed that Jesus was now inaugurating a new law, and that in doing so he was contradicting and repudiating the old. Nothing could be further from the truth. Indeed, the suggestion that he should do this is antecedently so improbable as to be impossible. Not only would this run counter to His lifelong attitude of reverent assent to Scripture, but He had just asserted that he had not 'come to abolish the law and the prophets . . . but to fulfill them' (v. 17). . . . What Jesus was contradicting here was not Scripture but tradition, not what 'is written' but what 'was said,' not God's word but the false interpretations of it of which the scribes and Pharisees were guilty.[18]

Christ was evaluating not the Older Testamental Law, but rather the pharisaical interpretations placed upon the Law. Jesus affirmed the solemn authority of the Old Testament that not even the least commandment of the entire Old Covenant writings was to be thought or taught as without binding validity today:

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[16]Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, *The Greek New Testament*, (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart) 1983.

[17] Ibid.

[18]John R. W. Stott, *Christ the Controversialist* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), 148.

> Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:19)

Surely, after such a strong declaration, Jesus would not immediately proceed to loosen a commandment of God's Law with "You heard," but "I say" (Matthew 5:21-48). For Jesus, "Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). Accordingly, Jesus reaffirmed elements of the Decalogue in His response to the rich young man: "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 19:18-19).

Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount, speaks of the abiding validity of the Law: "Do not think that I have come to abolish (**καταλῦσαι**, *katalusai*) the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matthew 5:17). Did Jesus give us a New Torah, as suggested by many, and abolish the Old? Is it possible that an individual's prejudice is so deep-seated that one-sidedness negates the possibility of understanding this text? We seldom ask what this text means; rather, we want to know how to answer our opponent. Have we, in general, approached the Bible to prove what we already believe rather than observe what it teaches? These are questions that we must consider in order to be honest with ourselves.

Not to Abolish but to Fulfill

Another stumbling block to many believers is the infinitive phrase, "to fulfill" (**πληρῶσαι**, *plērōsai*). This group of words is an enigma to many believers. Just what is meant by the infinitive utterance, "to fulfill them" (Matthew 5:17)? Also, how should we interpret Christ's statement: "I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (**γένηται**, *genētai*, "might become") [Matthew 5:18]. The NIV uses "fulfilled" (**πληρῶσαι**) in verse 17, but "accomplished" (**γένηται**) in verse 18. On the other hand, the KJV employs "fulfilled" in both verses, but is the meaning the same? Jesus's statement about the heaven and earth could not possibly refer to the physical universe, otherwise the Law would still be binding on Christians. The "heaven and earth" had to do with the overthrow of apostate Israel.[19]

Matthew uses two different Greek words for our English word "fulfill" in the KJV. The current interpretation attached to the word "fulfill" is generally understood in the sense of "relaxation" or "invalidation." But is this interpretation correct? Greg Bahnsen seems to have shown conclusively that the Greek words convey distinct meanings:

> The explicit and emphatic affirmation of the law's authority does not allow one to take "fulfillment" in verse 17 as any sort of euphemism for "relaxation" or "invalidation." At the same time in which God promised a new covenant He indicated that, far from being different from the first covenant, the ethical stipulations of that new covenant would be the same as the original law; God says he will write the law on His people's hearts, not change the law.[20]

Jesus says He came to "fulfill" (**πληρῶσαι**, *plērōsai*), not "to abolish" (**καταλῦσαι**, *katalusai*). Failure to distinguish between the two words ("fulfill" and "accomplish") employed by the Holy Spirit can lead to an erroneous understanding of the Sermon on the Mount. Ignorance of these words can lend an air of plausibility to one's interpretation. Just what does this aorist infinitive mean ("to fulfill," **πληρῶσαι**)? For example, does it indicate that Jesus put an end to,[21] replaces,[22] supplements,[23] to actively obey,[24] or enforcing or confirming?[25]

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[19] For an in-depth study of Heaven and Earth, I highly recommend the following books: (1) Don K. Preston, *Who Is This Babylon* (Ardmore, OK: JaDon Management, 2006), and (2) Don K. Preston, *The Elements Shall Melt with Fervent Heat: A Study of 2 Peter 3* (Ardmore, OK: JaDon Management, (2006).

[20] Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 46.

[21] Robert A. Hawkins, "Covenant Relations of the Sermon on the Mount," *Restoration Quarterly* 12 (First Quarter, 1969): 1-9.

[22] W. D. Davies, *Christian Origins and Judaism* (New York: Arno Press, 1973), 56.

The most detailed study of this infinitive phrase is that of Bahnsen. He draws attention to this ("enforcing," or "confirming") neglected aspect of "to fulfill":

> The establishment of God's will as the work of Christ plays an important part in Matthew's Christology; accordingly, Matthew Henry writes that the gospel is not the repeal of the law, but its reestablishment. Jesus says in Matthew 5:17 that he came to confirm and restore the full measure, intent, and purpose of the Older Testamental law. He sees the process of revelation deposited in the Older Testament as finding its validation in Him—its actual embodiment (cf. John 1:17). Jesus' own teaching represents a proclamation of the full implications of the commandments God delivered in the Older Testament in opposition to the legalistic scribal interpretations; His teaching demonstrates that God's law is more exacting and comprehensive than the current shallow and externalistic interpretations would lead people to think. *Pleerroo* should be taken to mean "confirm and restore in full measure." We must not think that the coming of Christ has invalidated the previous law of God, for the "word of the Lord abides forever" (1 Pet. 1:24-25).[26]

Our understanding of the Sermon on the Mount plays a central role in our application of the Old Testament to the Christian era. What is the central focus of Jesus in His Sermon? Is He propounding a "new law," or is He refuting the traditions of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law (scribes)? The context seems to indicate that Jesus addresses the nullifying attitude of the religious leaders toward the Law, not the Law itself. In other words, the leaders of Israel were making the Word of God ineffective through their traditions. In this Sermon, Jesus makes it clear that the model for Christian obedience to God's Law is not Pharisaical legalism, but obedience from the heart.[27] The Law did not pass away until every prophecy concerning Jesus and the end time of the Old Covenant World of Judaism vanished (AD 70).

The religious leaders' behavior excluded them from the kingdom of heaven: "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20). If we manifest this same kind of righteousness exhibited by the religious leaders, we too will not enter the kingdom of heaven. To illustrate the forcefulness of Jesus' teaching about *inward* righteousness versus *outward* righteousness, it will be helpful to reflect upon Jeremiah's graphic portrait of Israel's reliance upon the "temple of the Lord" in contradistinction to proper conduct, which behavior Jesus also addresses in His Sermon on the Mount.

> This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. [4]Do not trust in deceptive words and say, "This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!" [5]If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, [6] if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, [7] then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your forefathers for ever and ever. [8]But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless. [9]" 'Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury,[a] burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, [10] and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, "We are safe"—safe to do all these detestable things? [11]Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 7:3-11)

This same attitude toward God's Law is also reflected in the writings of Isaiah. Listen to God as He addresses the leaders in Israel for their lack of concern for the things that really matter:

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[23]J. Y. Campbell, "Fulfill, Accomplish," in *A Theological Word Book of the Bible*, ed. Alan Richardson (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1962), 87-88.

[24]Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 189-209.

[25]Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 64.

[26]Ibid.

[27]It is in this vein that Paul addresses the believers at Rome: "But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted." (Romans 6:17). The KJV renders this verse: "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you." The Greek text is: **ὑπηκούσατε δὲ ἐκ καρδίας** (*hypēkousate de ek kardias*, "but you obeyed from the heart").

[a] Or *and swear by false gods*

'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?' "Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. [4]Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. [5]Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? [6]"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to **loose** the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? [7]Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to **clothe** him, and **not to turn away** from your own flesh and blood? (Isaiah 58:3-7)

Many of the religious leaders, in Jesus' day, reflected the same mindset that existed in Israel. Their religion consisted in *outward* rituals, but not with *inward* righteousness. The words of Isaiah are very similar to the words of Jesus in His renunciation of the religious leaders in His judgment scene (Matthew 25:31-46). Ultimately, the whole of the Oliver Discourse had its fulfillment in AD 70. This parable of Jesus is an analysis of those condemned in Matthew 23 (seven woes against the leaders of Israel). In the Sermon on the Mount, as Jesus concludes the true interpretation of God's Law against the traditions of men, He warns His disciples with very vivid language about the ethical behavior of the teachers of the Law and Pharisees:

Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. [16] By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? [17]Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. [18]A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. [19]Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. [20]Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. [21]"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 7:15-21)

Within the New Heaven and Earth, God's people are still committed to ethical behavior that gives glory to God. Why must we practice *inward* as well as *outward* righteousness and teach the details of God's Law? Is it not because our righteousness (good works) must include the whole person? Jesus says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). Even though, as believers in Christ, we are not under Law but grace. We are still to practice ethical behavior since we are the salt and light of the world. In other words, the righteousness of the believer must exceed the *external* righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. What is Jesus' concern? Is it not about Law abuse? Is it not about neglect of the true intent of the Law? In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus goes to the very heart of the matter. In other words, Jesus repudiates the perverse externalistic interpretations of the Pharisees and their exegetical distortions of the Law. Not only were the Pharisees mistaken in this area of the Law, but they were also incorrect in their scheme of justification; the religious leaders sought salvation through works. To state more clearly, the religious leaders not only invalidated the intent of the Law by their disregard for the inward, but they also used the Law as their means of right standing before God.

The Sermon on the Mount zeroes in on the *external* versus the *internal* intent of the Law. For example, this famous Sermon is rounded off, as stated above, with an earnest appeal to beware of false prophets and a petition to put into practice His teachings. The first truth that our Lord Jesus Christ drives home in this Sermon is the authority of the Old Testament (Matthew 5:17-19). This testament remained in force until Jesus returned in AD 70 in which the martyred saints (Revelation 6:9-11; Hebrews 11:13-16) received their promised inheritance. Again, in concluding this Sermon, Jesus sums up the essence of the Law with what is now commonly called the "Golden Rule": "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12).

PAUL'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE LAW

As we contemplate the writings of Paul, we should be conscious that the Holy Spirit used Paul as an instrument to communicate His truths. There can be no contradiction between Paul and other statements of Holy Scripture. It appears, at least on surface reading, that Paul's negative statements about Law depreciate its authority in the life of the believer. For many believers, Paul's diversified "point of view" toward the Law is

one of the most baffling enigmas in biblical studies. At the very center of this problem is a statement of Paul to Christians in Rome: "Christ is the **end of the law** so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes" (Romans 10:4). How do we harmonize this statement of Paul with the statement of Jesus in His Sermon (Matthew 5:17-19)? Heikki Räisänen (1941-1215), Professor of New Testament Exegesis at the University of Helsinki from 1975 to his retirement in 2006, captures this dichotomy of Paul's theology this way:

> Paul has two sets of statements concerning the validity of the law for Christians. According to one set the law has been abrogated once and for all. According to the other the law is still in force, and what it requires is charismatically fulfilled by Christians.[28]

Paul's objection to the Law must be seen in its illegal use, that is to say, the use of the Law as a means of justification, not in its proper use, that is to say, the Law as an expression of God's will for humanity. For Paul, the Law is always explicitly the "law of God." Thus, Paul could express his delight in the Law: "For in my inner being **I delight in God's law**" (Romans 7:22). Again, Paul expresses his abiding status to the law in its relationship to his way of life: "Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my **mind am a slave to God's law**, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin" (Romans 7:25). The one who does not submit himself or herself to God's Law is hostile to God: "the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so" (Romans 8:7). Again, Paul speaks of the abiding validity of the Law as the thing that really counts: "circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. **Keeping God's commands** is what counts" (1 Corinthians 7:19). From these Scriptures, we can see at a glance that Paul delights in God's Law, serves the Law of God in his mind, and subjects himself to the Law of God.

One writer explains our subjection to the Law in these terms: "The nature of the Law is summed up in the statement that the Law is the good will of God. Hence not to be subject to the Law is enmity against God, R. 8:7."[29] Also, Paul's comments to the Corinthians is quite revealing: "To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (**though I am not free from God's law** but am **under [subject] Christ's law**), so as to win those not having the law" (1 Corinthians 9:21). Are we "under law"? Or are we "subject to law"? If we are under Law, then, we are still under condemnation. But what did Paul mean by his statement in 1 Corinthians 9:21? In verse 20 of this same chapter, Paul stresses that the Christian is **not** under law, but in verse 21, Paul appears to contradict what he had just stated. How do we respond properly to this apparent contradiction between the two verses? Perhaps, a parallel chart from the English and Greek text will clarify part of the dilemma:

1 Corinthians 9:20	1 Corinthians 9:21
To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those **under** the law I became like one **under** the law (though I myself am not **under** the law), so as to win those **under** the law.	To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am **under Christ's law**), so as to win those not having the law.

[28]Heikki Raisanen, "Paul's Theological Difficulties with the Law," in *Studia Biblica, 1978: Papers on Paul and Other New Testament Authors, Sixth International Congress on Biblical Studies*, ed. E. A. Livingston (Shefield: University Press, 1980), 305, quoted in Walter Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 308.

[29]Kittel, Gerhard and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), vol. 4, s.v. "The Law in the New Testament," by W. Gutbrod, 1071.

[20]καὶ ἐγενόμην τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις ὡς Ἰουδαῖος, ἵνα Ἰουδαίους κερδήσω· τοῖς **ὑπὸ** νόμον ὡς **ὑπὸ** νόμον, μὴ ὢν αὐτὸς **ὑπὸ** νόμον, ἵνα τοὺς **ὑπὸ** νόμον κερδήσω· [30]	[21]τοῖς ἀνόμοις ὡς ἄνομος, μὴ ὢν ἄνομος θεοῦ ἀλλα **ἔννομος** Χριστοῦ, ἵνα κερδάνω τοὺς ἀνόμους· [31]

In 1 Corinthians 9:20, Paul says "under law" (**ὑπὸ νόμον**, *hypo nomon*) four times; on the other hand, in 1 Corinthians 9:21, Paul does not employ "under law" (**ὑπὸ νόμον**), but rather, "subject to law" (**ἔννομος**, *ennomos*). In the chart above, "under law" is underlined in both the Greek and English text, and, also in 1 Corinthians 9:21, "under law" is underlined in both the Greek and English text. Paul forcefully states that he is "not under law" (v. 20). If this is so, and it is, we wonder why he would say that he was "under Christ's law" in the next verse (v. 21). In verse 21, Paul does not write "under law" (**ὑπὸ νόμον**), but "**subject** to Christ's law" (**ἔννομος**). No Christian is "under law," but every Christian is "subject to law" under Christ or "within law to Christ." Again, Paul says, "I am not free from God's law" (**ἄνομος θεοῦ**, *anomos theou*) but "within law to Christ" (**ἔννομος Χριστοῦ**, *ennomos Christou*).[32] There is no contradiction between these two verses. Did Paul ever consider himself without Law to God?

Paul's negative statements about Law concern the use of the Law as a means of justification, that is to say, an illegal use of the Law. Whenever we resort to the Law (any law for that matter—old or new) to justify our standing before God, then, we are using the Law in a way that God never intended. Paul calls attention to a righteousness "from God" through faith, not Law: "But now a righteousness **from God**, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness **from God** comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe" (Romans 3:21-22). The religious leaders of Israel were seeking righteousness by Law rather than by faith. Thus, Paul nails the coffin shut, as it were, for those who rely upon Law as the means of justification: "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin" (Romans 3:20). It is in this vein that John Murray (1839-1912) explains:

> The person who is 'under law' in the sense of Rom. vi. 14 is in bondage to sin in its guilt, defilement, and power. But this was not the consequence of being under the Mosaic economy during the period from Moses to Christ. Nor is 'under law', in this sense, to be confused with a similar term as it applies to a believer in Christ (1 Cor. ix. 21). Of the same force as 'under law', in this depreciatory sense is the expression 'of law' (Rom. iv. 14; Gal. 3.18, iii.16, iii. 2, 5, 10) refers to the same notion. 'apart from works of law' (Rom. Iii.21), he means a righteousness apart from works of law and therefore antithetical to a works-righteousness. When he says that we have been put to death to the law and discharged from the law (Rom. vii.4, 6), he refers to the breaking of that bond that binds us to the law as the way of acceptance with God (cf. Also Gal. ii.9). Law as law, as commandment requiring obedience and pronouncing its curse upon all transgression, does not have any potency or provision for the justification of the ungodly. The contrast between law-righteousness, which is our own righteousness, and the righteousness of God provided in Christ is the contrast between human merit and the gospel of grace (cf. Rom. x.3; Gal. ii.21, v. 4; Phil. iii.9). Paul's polemic in the epistles to the Romans and Galatians is concerned with that antithesis.[33]

Even though justification is by faith in Jesus, nevertheless, Paul submits the following question to cause reflection upon the Law's relevancy in the life of every believer: "Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law" (Romans 3:31). The written Law is an expression of God's righteousness. Again, Paul reinforces this truth when he writes: "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law" (Romans 13:8). In other words, Paul is

[30]Black, Matthew, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger, and Allen Wikgren. *The Greek New Testament*. Federal Republic of Germany: United Bible Societies, 1997, c1982.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Ibid., 1087-1088.

[33]John Murray, "Law," in *The New Bible Dictionary***,** ed. J. J. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 722.

saying that love expresses itself in obedience to the commandments. Immediately upon his explanation that love is the fulfillment of the Law, he pens:

> The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet,"[a] and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself."[b] 10 Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. (Romans 13:9-10)

JAMES' ATTITUDE TOWARD THE LAW

Just a perusal of the Book of James reveals the relevancy of the Law in our lives. No New Testament writer is more zealous for the fruits that accompany faith than James, our Lord's brother. In fact, James speaks of the Law as "the perfect law that gives freedom" (James 1:25). According to James, every believer who continues to look "intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:25). Not only does James call the Law "the perfect law," but he also speaks of it as the "royal law" (James 2:8). Is James talking about the Law itself? Listen to James as he explains his "royal law":

> If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself,"[a] you are doing right. 9 But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. 11 For he who said, "Do not commit adultery,"[b] also said, "Do not murder."[c] If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker. (James 2:8-11)

Again, James calls attention to the teaching that the Law also judges our relationship to fellow believers: "Brothers, do not slander one another. **Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it.** When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it" (James 4:11). Why such reliance upon the Law? Does James' dependence upon the Law reflect the words of Jesus—his Lord and brother in the flesh (Matthew 5:17-20)? Again, why such admonitions? Is it not that we are to be holy in our manner of life? The Law reflects the character of God. It is for this reason that Paul writes, "the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good" (Romans 7:12).

PETER'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE LAW

Peter also echoes upon the character of God in the Old Testament and appeals to the Old Testament writings for right behavior: "But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written (**γέγραπται**, *gegraptai*): '**Be holy, because I am holy**'" (1 Peter 1:15-16). This citation is taken from Leviticus: "The LORD said to Moses, 'Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy'" (Leviticus 19:2). It is also significant that the Hebrew writer concludes his Epistle with a reference to the Old Testament:

> Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. 5 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."[a]6 So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"[b] (Hebrews 13:4-6)

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[a] Exodus 20:13-15, 17; Deut. 5:17-19, 21
[b] Lev. 19:18
[a] Lev. 19:18
[b] Exodus 20:14; Deut. 5:18
[c] Exodus 20:13; Deut. 5:17
[a] Deut. 31:6
[b] Psalm 118:6, 7

This writer (Hebrews) cites two Old Testament passages (Joshua 1:5 and Psalms 118:6) to illustrate the presence and help of God. We must be free from the love of money and be content with what we have. We need nothing more because we always have the presence and help of God. Consider the following citations or comparisons of the above two Scriptures:

Joshua 1:5	Psalms 118:6
No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.	The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?

JOHN'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE LAW

For us to be relieved from the demands of the Law would contradict our relationship to God, which grace establishes. **Salvation is freedom from sin, not freedom to commit sin**. As Christians, we have respect and love for God's Law. We are now servants of righteousness. We are no longer servants of sin. We are concerned about God's Law. John puts it this way: "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). Again, John goes right to the heart of commandment keeping:

> The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But if anyone obeys his word, God's love[c] is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: 6 Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. (1 John 2:4-6)

CONCLUSION

The principle concern of this study is to set forth a brief summary of the various views advocated toward the relevancy of the Old Testament. Many scholars deny the Law any significance since we are under grace, not under Law. On the other hand, we find an equal number of scholars who appeal to the Old Testament as authoritative and relevant. Generally, the negative arguments are based upon negative statements of Paul—statements not viewed in context. It appears that expositors who repudiate the Old Testament fail to understand the emphasis of Paul in refuting the Judaizers' use of the Law as a means of right standing before God. **We must never use the Law as a means of justification.** On the other hand, we should employ the Law to assist us in progressive sanctification, that is to say, holiness in our walk with God. A perusal of the teachings of Jesus, Paul, James, Peter, and John advance the weight of the Old Testament for the believer.

It is imperative that we study the Hebrew Scriptures. Without a sound foundation of the Old Testament, we will fail to interpret numerous eschatological statements found in the New Testament. A knowledge of the Old Testament is essential to interpret correctly the Book of Revelation as well as many of books in the New Testament writings. Again, in conclusion, it is worthy of note to call attention to the negative statements about the Law in the Pauline Epistles. Paul's negative statements do not relate to the authority or relevance of the Old Testament, but rather, to justification. Men and women, says Paul, cannot be justified by Law:

> Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. 20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. **But now** a **righteousness from God**, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22This **righteousness from God** comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. 25God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement,[a] through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the

[c] Or *word, love for God*

[a] 25Or *as the one who would turn aside his wrath, taking away sin*

sins committed beforehand unpunished— [26] he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:19-26)

God is the one who justifies; Law can never justify. The Law **shuts** our mouths: "Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, **through the law we become conscious of sin**" (Romans 3:19-20). We could also say that through the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms that we understand the New Testament writings concerning eschatology. When we are in Jesus Messiah, then we can say with assurance: "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies" (Romans 8:33). Paul reinforces this thought with the statement: "Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes" (Romans 10:4). We are dead to the Law, but the Law is not dead. Even though Paul painted a rather dismal picture of those under Law, nevertheless, he spoke of a righteousness that is by faith, not Law: "But now a righteousness **from God**, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness **from God** comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe" (Romans 3:21-22).[34] Remember the final words of Paul to Timothy about the Old Testament:

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, [15] and **how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus**. [16] All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for **teaching**, **rebuking**, **correcting** and **training** in righteousness, [17] so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:14-17)

[34] For an in-depth study of this "righteousness from God," see Dallas Burdette, "Overview of Romans," in Dallas Burdette, *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood, FL: Xulon, 2008), 249-281.

2

A Literary Analysis Of the Gospel of Matthew

> Any hermeneutic that locates revelation primarily in the past is inevitably pessimistic. The very passing of time, which is definitive of history, distances us from the significant event and places us at an ever-greater disadvantage. The sentiment that accompanies such a perspective is the suspicion that we are missing something: if only we had been there, we would understand better. The hermeneutic that undergirds narrative criticism challenges this prejudice. Revelation is given through the story, which remains with us today. We are, in fact, in a privileged position, for the story interprets the events for us in ways that we might never have grasped if we had simply been there to witness them transpire in history.[35]

Chapter 2 sets the stage for subsequent chapters on how to correctly apply the principles of interpretation of Scripture in order to prevent division and destruction among God's people. This literary analysis of the Gospel of Matthew sets forth basic principles of interpretation. This study in Matthew's Gospel focuses upon how to determine who the "false prophets" are within the context of Jesus' use of the phrase. In order to arrive at a correct understanding, we need to examine the Book as a whole so as to determine who the false prophets are that Jesus refers to in His various discourses as reported by Matthew. The immediate context as well as the remote context (the book) is consulted to arrive at an accurate conception of the "false prophets" in Matthew's account of Jesus' ministry. Christians frequently do piece-meal interpretation and then build their theology on an isolated Scripture—a passage secluded from its framework. Matthew 7:15 is one of the most misunderstood Scriptures within the Christian community.

LITERARY CRITICISM

This chapter details the three major divisions in the Gospel of Matthew in order to understand more clearly as to whom the false prophets are about whom Jesus warns His disciples. The phrase "false prophet" is employed from Matthew's Gospel in order to justify separation from other believers when viewpoints do not often agree. To accomplish this objective of identification of the false prophets, literary techniques are employed to capture the conflict that envelops the whole of Matthew's Gospel. This overall analysis of the principles of literary interpretation should assist us in our understanding of this unique phrase by Jesus. The identity of Jesus is the focal point of all three major sections in Matthew. This study draws attention to the various viewpoints espoused by God, and the civil/religious leaders in Israel. This critical analysis reveals that unethical behavior and a denial that Jesus is the Son of God calls forth the epithet "false prophets."

[35]Mark Allen Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 99.

Since God's Revelation is given in story form to us, this form of communication enables us to arrive at a more precise identification of false prophets in the Gospel of Matthew. We can read the narrative by Matthew and follow the plot for an accurate description of the misleading instructors.[36] This detailed study is an overview of the Gospel from a literary perspective. This literary exploration explores the principles of exposition through the means of narrative investigation. Literary criticism controls the looseness that is frequently employed in the investigation of a solitary phrase.[37]

Literary criticism recognizes that a single text or multiple texts are a part of a larger whole. The three occurrences of "false prophets" in the Gospel of Matthew[38] can be properly exegeted when they are considered fragments of a continuous composition. John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay have correctly stated: "In attempting to understand a particular text, the exegete should seek to see the text within the structure of the major context as well as within the structure of the sub-units."[39] When we bring out questions about the literary placement of certain passages, we are able to arrive at certain conclusions that might otherwise be missed. Literary analysis of a text helps us to focus more closely upon the individual texts. This form of interpretation assists us in grasping more fully the intent of the author.

This philosophy of interpretation dealing with the complete text is thoroughly worked out by Mark Allen Powell in his study guide on narrative criticism.[40] He points out, justly so, that "Literary criticism focuses on the finished form of the text."[41] Again, Powell states the matter even more firmly, "Literary analysis does not dissect, or dismember, the text but discerns the connecting threads that hold it together."[42] Dissecting the text from its context contributes often times to an improper application of the text. The goal of literary criticism is to read the text as the *implied reader*[43] read the text.

The Implied Reader

The *implied reader* may know things that are not in the text. On the other hand, the *real reader* frequently consults outside reading in order to understand the text more fully.[44] Seymour Chatman in drawing attention to the meaning of the *implied reader* puts it this way: "The counterpart of the implied author is the *implied reader*—not the flesh-and-bones you or I sitting in our living rooms reading the book, but the audience

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[36]See Ronald David Witherup, "The Cross of Jesus: A Literary-Critical Study of Matthew 27," (Ph. D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1985), 56, where he comments on an important methodology of literary criticism.

> Contemporary literary criticism accepts the object of its study as literature in and of itself, not as a means to an end. As opposed to the other Biblical criticisms, there is no intention to look behind the text to discern history or sources. Literary criticism looks <u>at</u> a text, rather than <u>through</u> it. To use Murray Krieger's apt metaphor, the text is to be viewed not as a "window" through which one looks to discern what is on the other side; rather, it is a "Mirror" and the meaning of the text is thus on "this side" of the reading experience.

[37] Ibid., 95.

[38]Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24.

[39]John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook* (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1987), 75.

[40]Powell, *Criticism, 1-10.*

[41]Ibid., 7.

[42]Ibid.

[43]See M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 6th ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1993), 269, where he says,

> Iser distinguishes between the "implied reader," who is established by the text itself as one who will respond in specific ways to the "response-inviting structures" of the text, and the "actual reader," whose responses are inevitably colored by his or her accumulated private experiences.

[44]For an example of this distinction, see Dallas Burdette, "Passover Traditions in the Time of Christ," in *From Legalism to Freedom*, 181-195. This study concerning the Passover sets forth an example of the distinction between the *real reader* and the *implied reader*. The *real reader* goes to outside sources to discover what the *implied reader* already knew about the Passover traditions in the first century through first-hand knowledge. See also Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism*, 19-21.

presupposed by the narrative itself."[45] Narrative criticism helps to narrow the gap between the *real reader* and the *implied reader*.[46] This chapter is a narrative construction of Matthew's Gospel in order to try to comprehend as clearly as possible the discernment of the *implied reader* (original reader) as to who the false prophets are in the Gospel of Matthew.

Plot

As we begin to read the narrative penned by Matthew, we are immediately made aware that there is a plot. Whenever we have a plot, we have a story.[47] Chatman defines story as consisting of two parts—story and discourse.[48] For Chatman story has to do with a chain of events (actions, happenings) whereas discourse is the means by which the story (content) is communicated.[49] Jack Kingsbury, adopting the definition of Chatman, applies this concept to the story of Matthew's narrative by demonstrating that "The 'story' of Matthew is of the life of Jesus from conception and birth to death and resurrection."[50] On the other hand, Kingsbury in his differentiation between story and discourse says, "The 'discourse' of Matthew is the means whereby this story of Jesus' life is told."[51] In other words, the story is *what* is told whereas discourse is *how* the story is told.[52] E. M. Forster as early as 1927 says, "a story is a narrative of events arranged in time sequence."[53] This arrangement of events is self-evident when we look at the Gospel of Matthew as story.

Chatman also describes a story as consisting of three parts—events, characters, and settings.[54] The events are the strings of movements that stretch out from the beginning to the end of the story. In other words, the events cover the whole distance of the report. One dominant trait in Matthew is the reporting of conflict (events) between Jesus and the religious leaders. It is these events that comprise the plot, or flow, of the narration. An understanding of plot can deepen our understanding of who the false prophets were in the Gospel of Matthew. Morner and Rausch thoughtfully define plot as

> The careful arrangement by an author of INCIDENTS in a NARRATIVE to achieve a desired effect. Plot is more than simply the series of happenings in a literary work. It is the result of the writer's deliberate selection of interrelated actions (what happens) and choice of arrangement (the order of happening) in presenting and resolving a CONFLICT.[55]

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[45]Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 149-150; Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1974); David Robert Bauer, "The Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Literary-Critical Examination," (Ph. D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1985), 24-26; Dorothy Jean Weaver, "The Missionary Discourse in the Gospel of Matthew: A Literary Critical Analysis," (Ph. D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1987), 66.

[46]See W. K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1982), where he counsels Christians not to reject literary criticism.

> Religious thinkers should be sympathetic to criticism because it is a branch of philosophy; it is an effort to get at certain truths about signs, knowledge, and reality. If these remarks seem at all platitudinous, let me add that I have taken the trouble to make them because it seems to me possible for the thought and scholarship of religious persons (especially in America today) to be too far sold in the cultivation of certain merely historical, informational, and neutral techniques. This may have been for a time a necessary phase of competition with secular science and secular education. But there is no reason why Christians should be the last (or even be slow) to transcend the limitations of such knowledge, to outgrow pedantic misconceptions and participate in literary philosophy.

[47]See Witherup, " Cross of Jesus," 120, 139.

[48]Chatman, *Story*, 19-27.

[49]Ibid., 19.

[50]Jack Kingsbury, *Matthew As Story*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 3.

[51]Ibid.

[52]See also Bauer, "The Cross of Jesus," 62.

[53]E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1927), 30.

[54]Chatman, *Story*, 19, 26.

[55]Kathleen Morner and Ralph Rausch, "Plot" in *NTC's Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Chicago: NTC/Contemporary Publishing Company, 1997), 167.

We cannot read Matthew's story[56] and not observe his choice of arrangements in presenting his story of conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders. Matthew foreshadows the hostility between Jesus and the leaders of Israel in his first section (1:1—4:16). Next, he describes indirect collision (4:17—11:1). Then he pictures direct confrontation (11:2-16:20); and, finally the friction is resolved in the crucifixion of Jesus (16:21—28:20). An understanding of plot (sequence of events) facilitates comprehension of the whole. There is a difference between story and plot. Forster's comments on this distinction are worthy of citation.

> We have defined a story as a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence. A plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality. "The king died and then the queen died" is a story. "The king died, and then the queen died of grief" is a plot. The time-sequence is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it.[57]

In the development of plot, we recognize the translating of characters into action.[58] In the plot of Matthew's story, conflict exists between two opposing forces—Jesus and the religious leaders. Matthew's plot structure begins with exposition (important background information), and then develops the build-up of tension between opposing forces and finally the plot arrangement reaches a climax in its resolution of the conflict—the death of Jesus.[59] In narrative writing, there is a beginning, middle, and end to plot.[60]

Point of View

In examining plot in Matthew's story, we are immediately confronted with various evaluative points of view about the identity of Jesus.[61] "The notion of point of view is a pervasive one in narrative criticism," says Powell.[62] There is a contrast in the Book of Matthew between God's point of view and the religious leaders' point of view concerning the identity of Jesus. We also observe other points of view concerning the crowds. If our point of view does not harmonize with God's point of view as revealed in Matthew 3:17 and 17:5, then we are not thinking the things of God, but rather the things of men (16:23).[63]

As we peruse the Book of Matthew, we cannot help but observe various points-of-view about Jesus?[64] We encounter Matthew's point of view about Jesus in the prologue (Chapters 1 and 2). Also in the prologue, Matthew gives a foretaste of the religious leaders' point-of-view about Jesus.[65] Following the baptism of Jesus, Matthew reveals God's point-of-view about who Jesus really is. Throughout the Gospel of Matthew, we are confronted over and over with various points of view as to who Jesus really is.

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[56]See Dorothy Jean Weaver, "The Missionary Discourse in the Gospel of Matthew: A Literary Critical Analysis," (Ph. D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1987), 31, where she summarizes quite succinctly the story, plot and setting: "This story can be viewed in terms of three basic elements: characters (the actors in the story), plot (the sequence of events within the story), and setting (the designated location or surroundings within which any given event of the story takes place)."

[57]Forster, Novel, 86.

[58]See Bauer, "Structure," 26, where he comments on "plot":

> Another aspect of literary criticism which has received a great deal of attention lately is the "plot." Put succinctly, the plot is the arrangement of incidents within the narrative, considered in light of their relations to one another. A distinction is usually made between the arrangement of events in the narrative time and that in the story time to which the narrative refers. The narrative may include such devices as flash back or foreshadowing, forcing the readers to place the incidents thus described in their proper temporal position within the story.

[59]See also Morner and Rausch, *NTC's Dictionary*, 168.

[60]Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Story*, 43.

[61]Ibid., 34.

[62]Powell, *Criticism*, 23; See also Weaver, "Discourse," 67.

[63]For an excellent treatment of the various evaluative points of view in Matthew's Gospel, see Kingsbury, S*tory*, 1988), 33-37; Morner and Rausch, *NTC's Dictionary*, "Point of View," 170-171; M. H. Abrams, "Point of View," *Literary Terms*, 165-169. See also Mark Allen Powell, "The Religious Leaders in Matthew: A Literary-Critical Approach," (Ph., D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1988), 176-184.

[64]See Witherup, "Cross of Jesus," 76-86; Weaver, "Discourse," 68-100; Kingsbury, *Story*, 33-42.

[65]Powell, "Leaders," 184.

As we move from the disciples to the Jewish crowds and then to the religious leaders, we observe the degree to which each group deviates from thinking the things of God to thinking the things of men. Matthew records one such example in which one of the disciples did not think the things of God. For instance, he informs his readers that as Jesus begins His journey to Jerusalem to die for the sins of humanity that He rebukes Peter for not having in mind the thinking of God. Matthew records this encounter: "Jesus turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men'" (16:23). In other words, Peter did not think the things of God concerning the necessity of the Atonement, but rather the things of men in his seeking to prevent God's purpose for the salvation of men and women through the sacrificial offering of Jesus for the sins of the world.

One purpose of this chapter is to investigate the various viewpoints set forth by the numerous characters in the Gospel of Matthew to see how well the characters' points of view coincides with that of God's. In order to accomplish this target, it is necessary to cover briefly the structure of Matthew's history of salvation. This chapter will reveal that the religious leaders' point of view was in direct opposition to God's point of view. This rejection of God's point of view by the leaders of Israel called forth from Jesus the epithet—false prophets.

THE STRUCTURE OF MATTHEW'S HISTORY OF SALVATION

Three Major Divisions in Matthew

There are three broad segments in Matthew's gospel.[66] The three segments are: (1) The unveiling of Jesus' identity [1:1—4:16];[67] (2) The ministry of Jesus to Israel and Israel's repudiation of Jesus [4:17—16:20];[68] and (3) The pilgrimage of Jesus to Jerusalem, which also includes an account of His crucifixion, burial, and resurrection [16:21—28:20].[69] It appears that Matthew employed a formula to signal the beginning of each new part. For example, he says, following the end of segment one: "From that time on Jesus began to preach" (4:17) and with the beginning of section three: "From that time on Jesus began to explain" (16:21). Did Matthew intend to call attention to important turns in his story? If so, this gives rise to the above outline.[70]

It seems appropriate to analyze the Book of Matthew from the perspective of three major divisions to more clearly grasp the development of conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders. Even if this division is not the real intent of Matthew, nevertheless, this three-part partition can still assist us in understanding the Word of God more clearly. As we advance through the three groupings, it will become apparent that there is progression in the story of Jesus. In the first part (1:1—4:16), Matthew foreshadows[71] the conflict with the religious leaders who are also called false prophets in 7:15. In Part Two (4:17—16:20) the conflict with the religious leaders begin, but with Part Three (16:21—28:20) the confrontation with the religious leaders escalates to the point of their putting Him to death (26:57-67; 27:32-55).[72]

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[66]I am indebted to Kingsbury's book, *Matthew as Story,* for calling my attention to this threefold structure. This overview of Matthew's structure follows the development by Kingsbury. See also Powell, "Leaders," 39-41; Witherup, "Cross of Jesus," 112-150; David Robert Bauer, "The Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Literary-Critical Examination," (Ph. D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1985).

[67]Kingsbury, *Story*, 43-58.

[68]This second section may be further divided into two subdivisions: (1) Ministry of Jesus to Israel [4:17-11:1]; and (2) Israel's repudiation of Jesus [11:2-16:20]; Witherup, The Cross of Jesus, 34; Bauer, "Structure," 185.

[69]Kingsbury, *Story*, 77-93.

[70]For an analysis of the structure of Matthew, see Witherup, "Cross of Jesus," 142, 152.

[71]Witherup, "Cross of Jesus," 89.

[72]Weaver, "Discourse," 62.

FIRST MAJOR SECTION

1:1—4:16

The aim of this first section is to "present Jesus to the reader so that we will know throughout the rest of the story precisely who Jesus is."[73] As we approach this first section (1:1—4:16), there does appear to be literary unity from beginning to end. For example, consider the following scenario that testifies to the unity of 1:1—4:16. For instance, the formula quotation in Matthew 2:23 is linked to the formula quotation in 4:12-16 through the naming of the geographical location of His ministry:

- And he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene." (2:23)

- When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee. [13]Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— [14] to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: [15]"Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— [16]the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."[a] (4:12-16)

Again, Matthew (2:15) informs us that Joseph took Jesus to Egypt,

- Where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son." (2:15)

These three citations (2:23; 4:12-16; 2:15) along with the baptismal declaration (3:17) declare the unity of 1:1-4:16. The baptismal declaration reads: "And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'" This passage (3:17) is foreshadowed by the prophecy in 2:15. Also, 4:12-16 is reflective of the fulfillment prediction in 2:23. The identity of Jesus also acts as glue that gives cohesion to Part One. This section (1:1—4:16) also foreshadows the false prophets that Jesus addresses in His Sermon on the Mount as well as His eschatological discourse (Chapter 24).

THE IDENTITY OF JESUS

God's Evaluative Point of View

In this first section (1:1-4:16), Matthew unveils Jesus' identity. In this division, we find the most climatic statement regarding the identity of Jesus. The ultimate declaration as to the identity of Jesus is from God in the baptismal scene of Jesus: "And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased'" (3:17). In this baptismal pericope, God personally enters the world of Matthew's story and declares Jesus to be His Son in whom He is pleased.[74] God in making this declaration expresses His evaluative point of view concerning Jesus' real identity, that is to say, how He thinks about Jesus. For us to trace properly the flow of Matthew's story from beginning to end, we must consider the first part as a major contribution to the unfolding of the Jesus drama. Before developing God's evaluative point of view in more detail, it will be helpful to consider other points of view about Jesus in this first segment.

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[73]Kingsbury, *Story*, 98.

[a] Isaiah 9:1, 2

[74]For an excellent commentary on God entering the world as actor, see Weaver, "Discourse," 90; Witherup, "Cross of Jesus," 124.

Matthew's Evaluative Point of View

Matthew's point of view is that Jesus is the Son of God.[75] For example, in the prologue, Matthew sets the tone for the development of the real identity of Jesus—Jesus is the Son of God. To illustrate, Matthew, after revealing the angel's announcement of the birth of Jesus, adds his own comments, which reveals his own point of view:

> She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,[a] because he will save his people from their sins."
> [22] All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: [23] "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"[b]—which means, "God with us." (1:21-23)

Matthew reveals his point of view about Jesus by citing the virgin birth prophecy (Isaiah 7:14). This reference also discloses God's hand in the scheme of redemption for sinful men and women. Since Jesus is the supreme player, Matthew immediately advances the Davidic and Messiah-King claims through the genealogy (Matthew 1:1-17). Matthew lets us know that God has guided the whole of Israel's history in the promises He made to Abraham (Genesis 17:1-9)[76] and David (Isaiah 11:1). Matthew informs his readers that even in the face of the Babylonian captivity (Matthew 1:12) God was still in control. Since Jesus as the Messiah is the heir of Abraham and David, Matthew begins his Gospel by calling attention to this truth: "A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham" (1:1). It is also significant that in this genealogy that Matthew combines the name Jesus with the name Christ. The name Jesus Christ (1:1, 21) also makes known God's point of view as well as Matthew's point of view.

The name Jesus (**Ἰησοῦς**, *Iēsous*) is descriptive of His mission. On the other hand, the term Christ (Χριστός, Cristos) is descriptive of His being appointed by the Father. Since Matthew gives the personal name of the Messiah as Jesus (1:16), the reader should give special attention to the importance of this name. This name assigned to Jesus is of heavenly origin. Matthew informs us that an angel of God instructed Joseph to name Him Jesus (1:20-21). Matthew chronicles Joseph's response to the angel: "He gave him the name Jesus" (1:25). Matthew sounds the identity of Jesus through the genealogy of names and the titles placed at the beginning of his account.

In the name Jesus, we discover that God is active in Him for the salvation of humanity. Matthew not only refers to the one born in Bethlehem as Jesus, but he also adds the title Christ for further identification. Christ is the title of Jesus, not his name. Among all the titles assigned to Jesus, Christ is the most general. Matthew not only affirms in 1:1 that Jesus is the Christ (ὁ Χριστός, Jo Cristos), or Messiah—a confession that Peter will later make (16:16)—but also that he is "Son of David" and "Son of Abraham."

Matthew includes the genealogy to assert that God has guided the whole of Israel's history so that it might culminate in the birth of Jesus. For Matthew, Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of David, and the Son of Abraham. Thus, Matthew in this first section (1:1-4:16) sets forth his evaluative point of view as to who Jesus really is. From the beginning of his Gospel, Matthew informs us that Jesus is Christ, and, then concludes the final chapter of Christ's rejection of Israel's leaders by recording Pilate's question to the chief priest and elders (27:20): '"What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?', Pilate asked" (27:22). Even the high priest in Jesus' final hours asked Him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son

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[75] See Kingsbury, *Story*, 35.

[a] *Jesus* is the Greek form of *Joshua*, which means *the LORD saves.*

[b] Isaiah 7:14

[76] When Abram was ninety nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers." Abram fell face down, and God said to him, "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.'"(Genesis 17:1-8)

of God" (26:63). Did Jesus refuse to answer the high priest because He knew that his question was not sincere? Observe the contrast between the Magi and the religious leaders—the Magi worshipped Him, but the religious leaders cried out: "Crucify him!" (27:22).

The Magi's Evaluative Point of View about Jesus

Following the birth of Jesus, the Magi from the East arrived in Jerusalem and inquired about Him who is "born King of the Jews" (2:2). This phrase, "king of the Jews," sets forth the evaluative point of view of the Magi concerning Jesus' identity.[77] In fact, the rest of 2:2 reads: "We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him." Immediately, in Matthew's story, we quickly observe the contrast between Herod and the Magi. The Magi's evaluative point of view is in harmony with God's evaluative point of view. Matthew begins his Gospel with a reference to Jesus as "king of the Jews" and concludes the passion narrative with a reference to Jesus as the "king of the Jews" (27:37).

When Jesus was brought before Pilate, he inquired of Him to tell him if he were the "king of the Jews." Matthew records Pilate's question and Jesus' answer: "Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' 'Yes, it is as you say,' Jesus replied" (27:11). Jesus' response reinforces the response of the Magi. Again, in the closing scene of Jesus' crucifixion, one finds this name over the cross: "Above his head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS" (27:37).

Herod and the Religious Leaders' Point of View

Herod's evaluative point of view is not in harmony with God's. To illustrate Herod's point of view, it is necessary to turn to Matthew's prologue to observe his actions about learning of the birth of Jesus. Matthew says, "When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. Get up, he said, take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill Him" (2:13). Herod and the religious leaders are closely tied together in this story. Matthew sets the stage for the further development of the animosity of the leaders against Jesus.

In this First Section (1:1—4:16), Matthew foreshadows the rejection of Jesus by the "chief priests and the teachers [scribes] of the law" (2:4) when they do not respond to what they know to be true. When Herod inquired of them as to where the Christ should be born, they responded correctly, but did not act on that knowledge: '"In Bethlehem in Judea,' they replied, 'for this is what the prophet has written'" (2:5). Matthew suggests beforehand the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders that will ultimately end in His death. As Jesus completes His ministry to Israel, He forewarns His disciples about the clandestine operation of the religious leaders: "From that time on Jesus began to explain to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life" (16:21).

Again, Matthew reveals Jesus' prediction about His death by the leaders of Israel: "When they came together in Galilee, he said to them, 'The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life.' And the disciples were filled with grief" (17:22-23). Finally, for the third time, Jesus reveals the evaluative point of view of the leaders in that He once more makes known their intent to destroy Him: "Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, 'We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!'" (20:17-19).

As Matthew concludes his Gospel, he draws attention to the religious leaders (referred to as false prophets in 7:15 and 24:11, 24) in their final outrage against Him.

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[77]See Kingsbury, *Story*, 48-49.

In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. [42]"He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. [43]He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.' " [44]In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him. (27:41-44)

"He saved others" is reflective of 1:21; "He's the King of Israel" is reflective of 2:2; and "I am the Son of God" is reflective of 3:17. The chief priest, the teachers of the Law, or the elders did not have the mind of God in their conception of Jesus.

John the Baptist's Evaluative Point of View

John the Baptist's evaluative point of view is revealed in his confrontation with the religious leaders (Matthew 3:7-12).[78] For example, Matthew captures John's graphic prediction of the Coming One in glowing terms: "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (3:11-12). The chaff represents the religious leaders (false prophets) who did not share God's evaluative point of view.

Satan's Evaluative Point of View

Following the baptismal scenario, even Satan acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God:

- The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." (4:3)[79]
- Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down." (4:5-6)

Satan expresses God's point of view about Jesus, but he did not possess God's point of view about Jesus' purpose in coming (4:1-11). He did not think the things of God. It is in this vein that our Lord rebuked Peter for not having the mind of God concerning His death upon the cross (16:21-23).

Peter's Evaluative Point of View

Peter's evaluation of Jesus in 16:13-20 reflects God's evaluative point of view in 3:17. Matthew highlights God's point of view in the baptismal scene of Jesus. Apart from Matthew's introduction—"Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John" (3:13)—we observe a dialogue between John and Jesus (3:14-15) and two revelatory events that follow (3:16-17). Following the baptism of Jesus, one hears the voice of God: "And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased'" (3:17). As stated above, after this acknowledgement by God, Matthew records Jesus' encounter with Satan (4:1-11). It is quite evident that Satan did not deny what God stated, but he did not think the things of God. In other words, he sought to undermine God's way of redemption. Later in Matthew's story (16:21-28:20) when Peter tried to prevent the Atonement, Jesus rebuked him, because, he, too, did not think the things of God: "Get

[78]See Kingsbury, *Story*, 49-51, for an insightful analysis of the Baptist's point of view.

[79]In the Greek New Testament there are many kinds of conditional statements. There are four classes of conditional sentences that are outstanding in usage. The first class condition, the one employed by Satan, affirms the reality of the condition. It is expressed by (*ei*, "if") with the indicative mood in the protasis (if clause) and almost any mood or tense in the apodosis (main or fulfillment clause **εἰ**). This interpretation is required according to Greek syntax. Whenever the indicative with ει (*ei* "if" clause) is employed instead of the subjunctive with **ἐάν** (*ean*, "if" clause), then, one must assume the truth of the protasis (if clause). This construction confirms the condition and is best translated "Since you are the Son of God. . . ."

behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men" (16:23). Surely, the implied reader must have reflected back upon the temptation scene of Jesus (4:1-12).

But Peter, prior to this rebuke, confessed the mind of God: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (16:16). Following this confession, Jesus says, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven" (16:17). This statement by Jesus is also reminiscent of the baptismal scene in which God publicly declared Jesus to be His Son (3:17). Immediately after Jesus reveals His death, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John into the Mount of Transfiguration. Once more, God enters the world of man and proclaims: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" (17:5).

SECOND MAJOR SECTION

4:17—16:20

Following Matthew's introduction to Jesus as Messiah (1:1—4:16), he embarks upon Jesus' ministry to the nation of Israel (4:17—11:1).[80] Matthew calls attention to Jesus' ministry with three passages that focus upon His teaching, preaching, and healing (4:23; 9:35; 11:1). Just as John began his ministry with a call to repentance, so did Jesus: "From that time on Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near"' (4:17). Jesus viewed the multitudes as sheep without a shepherd: "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (9:36). The leaders of Israel (false prophets) had become evil. This evil caused Jesus to respond with: "You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks" (12:34). This statement of Jesus is also an echo of John's denunciation of the Pharisees and Sadducees who approached John: "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance"' (3:7-8).

JESUS' MINISTRY TO ISRAEL

4:17—11:1

Jesus' Teaching Ministry to Israel

In Jesus' ministry to Israel, He rebukes the religious leaders for their refusal to discern the will of God for their lives (5:20), and He also summons the crowds to repent and believe the Gospel (4:17; 4:23; 9:35; 11:1). After Jesus learns of John's imprisonment, He returns to Galilee to continue His ministry to Israel (4:12). Later He leaves Nazareth and lives in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali (4:12-13). During this period of time, He proclaims the Good News that the kingdom of heaven is near (4:17). On one occasion as Jesus walks by the Sea of Galilee, He calls Simon Peter and Andrew (brother of Peter) to follow Him (4:18-20). Shortly thereafter, He also invites two other brothers (James and John) to follow Him (4:21-22). Following a number of miracles by Jesus (see Chapters 8 and 9), Jesus calls Matthew to become one of His disciples (9:9-13). Then, in Chapter 10, Matthew informs us that He calls all of His disciples unto Himself (10:1-4).

Following the call of His disciples, Matthew informs his readers that Jesus went throughout Galilee "Teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people" (4:23). It is significant that Matthew repeats these three activities in 9:35 and 11:1. The third summary of Jesus' ministry only mentions two of the three deeds.

[80]See Kingsbury, *Story*, 59-76.

Matthew 4:23	Matthew 9:35	Matthew 11:1
Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.	Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.	After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.

As a result of these activities, His fame spread throughout Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and the region across the Jordan (4:25). His healing ministry quickly spread all over Syria (4:24), and as a result of this healing ministry people flocked from all over the area to be healed. Matthew reports the events with these words:

> News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them. [25] Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis,[a]Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him. (4:24-25)

Immediately following this healing ministry, Jesus saw the crowds that accompanied Him and He went up on a mountain and began to teach His disciples (5:1-7:28). If we want to understand what He taught (4:23), then we must read the Sermon on the Mount. In this Sermon, Jesus taught His disciples that repentance involves a call to responsibility. This Sermon is a direct refutation of the teachings and practices of the religious leaders (5:17-20). Following this teaching, Matthew gives a comment that is rather striking: "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law" (7:28-29). Just as in the first section of Matthew's story (1:1—4:16), the reader is once again alerted to the hypocrisy of the leaders of Israel. The battle is about to begin but does not really take hold with increased momentum until Chapter 12.

This battle of friction was suggested beforehand in His exhortation concerning impending persecution by the religious leaders (5:10-13) whom He later described as false prophets (7:15). After the Beatitudes, Jesus further warns the disciples about inner motives for right behavior. Again Jesus alerts His listeners to the religious leaders: "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (5:20). This statement by Jesus echoes John's renunciation of the Pharisees (3:7) and the complicity of the teachers of the Law with Herod (2:4).

Jesus, following His reference to the righteousness of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law (scribes), pinpoints some of their teachings (5:21-48) and acts of piety (6:1-18). In calling attention to their teachings, He says, "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago" (5:21a), "But I tell you" (5:22). Jesus is not contradicting the Law, but rather He is setting forth the true interpretation of the Law. He is not nullifying the Law; that is to say, He is not setting aside the requirements of the Law. If Jesus is abolishing the Law as advocated by many Christians, then this interpretation contradicts Jesus' earlier statement:

> Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. [18]I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. [19]Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (5:17-19)

[a] That is, the Ten Cities

Jesus' Healing Ministry to Israel

Jesus' ministry to Israel not only includes teaching, but His ministry also reached out to those that were sick physically (8:1-9:38). With the healing ministry of Jesus, Matthew's readers are being prepared for the beginning of hostilities against Jesus. The skirmishes against Jesus are foreshadowed in the first part of Matthew's story (1:1—4:16) and also Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount foretells the confrontations (5:10-12). After coming down from the mountain, Jesus engages in a healing ministry (Chapters 8 and 9 record ten miracles). Matthew makes known that Jesus heals a leper (8:1-4), restores a paralyzed servant of a centurion (8:5-13), cures Peter's mother-in-law (8:14-15), and, later that evening, He casts out demons and heals all the sick (8:16-17). Not only does Matthew record therapeutic miracles, but he also tells about a non-therapeutic miracle, namely, the calming of the winds and the waves of the sea (8:23-27). Following the non-therapeutic miracle, Matthew discloses the healing of two demon-possessed men (8:28-34).

After these healings, Jesus entered a boat and returned to His own town (9:1). Upon His arrival, men of the city brought a paralytic to Him (9:2a). Instead of telling him to get up, Jesus simply says, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven" (9:2b). Matthew now introduces his readers to an indirect confrontation with Jesus by the teachers of the Law. Again, we are reminded of the words of Jesus following His evaluation of the ethical behavior and teachings of the religious leaders: "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves" (7:15). These teachers of the Law do not openly confront Him about His statement on forgiveness, but as Matthew says, "At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, 'This fellow is blaspheming!'" (9:3). Suddenly, in this ninth chapter, we witness conflict as it materializes. To illustrate, we should observe Matthew's telling of the story. He says that Jesus, "knowing their thoughts," said to them:

> Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? [5] Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? [6] But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. . . ." Then he said to the paralytic, "Get up, take your mat and go home." [7] And the man got up and went home. [8] When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to men. (9:4-8).

Not only does the second section (4:17—16:20) of Part One (4:17—11:1) emphasize Jesus' ministry to Israel, but it also emphasizes the disciples' ministry to Israel. Jesus sends the Twelve out to "Preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons" (10:7-8). Conspicuously absent is the command to teach. They were to perform, at least from the context, two aspects of ministry: (1) proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is near, and (2) perform miracles of healing.

Next in Chapter 10, we behold bitter, antagonistic conflict on the horizon. By the end of this second discourse (the charge to the Apostles), one senses the trend toward warlike conflict toward Jesus by the religious leaders. In this chapter (10), Jesus again cautions them about the religious leaders as He did in the Sermon on the Mount (7:15). He says, "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves" (10:16). He also warns them to "Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues" (10:17). Jesus had earlier warned them about the reaction of people in general as well as the dangers of the religious leaders.

> Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. [11] "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. [12] Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (5:10-12)

Jesus' Preaching Ministry to Israel

As stated earlier, Jesus "went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people" (4:23). In 4:17, Matthew reports Jesus as saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." It is through this proclamation that Jews and

Gentiles alike will be enjoined upon to make a decision. The question is: Will they repent and become followers of Jesus and enter the sphere of God's gracious Rule, or will they refuse to enter God's kingdom and live in the sphere of Satan's Rules?

What does the "kingdom of heaven" mean? Does not this phrase simply call attention to the truth that God rules? Is the kingdom of heaven equivalent to someone saying the Rule of God, or God reigns? When John said, "the kingdom of heaven is near" (3:2), did he not denote that the kingdom is coming near, or is approaching? John, Jesus, and the Apostles were advancing the concept that God has drawn near. For Matthew, God draws near in the person of Jesus Messiah, the Son of God. Matthew reports that "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, 'God with us'" (1:23). And in 12:28, Matthew states Jesus' announcement: "if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."

The Gospel of the kingdom is about Jesus Messiah, the Son of God. The Gospel of the kingdom is clear: it is the Good News about God's way of salvation that is revealed in Jesus. The Gospel is that which the angel announces to Joseph: "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (1:21). The Gospel is simply Good News about God's way of salvation by grace through Jesus. Jesus sums up this Good News in a conversation with Nicodemus:

> For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,[f] that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. [17] For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. [18] Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.[g] [19]This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. [20] Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. [21]But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."[h] (John 3:16-21)

THE ELEMENT OF CONFLICT IN 4:17—11:1

The element of conflict does not dominate 4:17—11:1 (part "A") as it does in 11:2—16:20 (part "B"). Part "A" of the second major section focuses more on the teaching, preaching, and healing (4:23; 9:35; 11:1) than it does on the friction between Jesus and the scrupulous leaders. Nevertheless, the reader still reads of hostility between Jesus and the religious leaders. In part "A" the reader is alerted to disunity between Jesus and the religious leaders in His healing of the paralytic (9:1-8). In this first section, we are led to count on battle. In 4:17—8:34, Matthew forewarns the reader that we are to anticipate conflict. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount warns the disciples about persecution (5:10-12), and He also describes the righteousness that falls short of what is necessary for entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven (5:20).

Jesus in His now-famous Sermon speaks of the acts of piety performed by religious leaders as being hypocritical in nature (6:1-18). Following this rebuke of the rigid leaders' motives, then Matthew concludes the Sermon on the Mount with: "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law" (7:28-29). Finally, Matthew records Jesus' admiration of the centurion's faith (8:5-10) versus the lack of faith on the part of the leaders: "I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (8:11-12).

Now in Chapter 9, the conflict that the readers have been led to anticipate shows its ugly face. It has now materialized. It is here, not in full bloom, but in bud. This conflict is not direct but indirect. Matthew carefully reveals that the charges brought against Him, following the healing of a paralytic, were indirect: "At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, 'This fellow is blaspheming!'" (9:3). They declare "to

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[f] Or *his only begotten Son*

[g] Or *God's only begotten Son*

[h] Some interpreters end the quotation after verse 15.

themselves," says Matthew. Following the call of Matthew into discipleship, the religious leaders observed Jesus having dinner with tax collectors and sinners in Matthew's home (9:9-10). The Pharisees objected to Jesus' behavior, but they did not question Jesus directly about His behavior but rather His disciples (9:11).

In Chapter 10, Jesus summons His disciples and delivers to them His missionary charge (10:1-15). In the conclusion of this missionary charge, Jesus immediately forewarns them of irreconcilable conflict between themselves and the people (10:16-39). Just as Jesus had warned them about false prophets (religious leaders) in the Sermon on the Mount (7:15), now Jesus warns them about "wolves" (the people) in His sending them out to preach and to heal (10:7, 8, 16).[81]

In the first major section (1:1—4:16), Matthew presents Jesus as the main character of his story. He demonstrates that Jesus is aligned with God as His authoritative Son (3:17). Matthew discloses two evaluative points of view that forcefully stand out in this first section; namely, God's point of view that Jesus is His Son (3:17) and Satan's challenge to Jesus in this capacity (4:3, 6).[82] The secular and religious leaders in this part of the story are characterized as evil. Their evaluative point of view is an observation that is at odds with God's declaration. The religious leaders are not only set forth as aligned with Herod (2:1-6), but they are also set in opposition to John the Baptist who is supportive of Jesus (3:7-12).[83] In this first section, we come away with the recognition that neither Jesus nor the religious leaders are aware of each other. But, in spite of this lack of awareness, we, upon a closer reading, immediately grasp that the leaders' threat to Jesus is foreshadowed through Herod's plot to kill Jesus (2:3-6). Also we immediately grasp Jesus' eschatological judgment (Matthew 24 and 25) as foreshadowed through the prophecy of John the Baptist:

> But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? [8] Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. [9] And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. [10] The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. [11] "I baptize you with[b] water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. [12] His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire." (3:7-12)

As stated above, the second major section (4:17—16:20) of Matthew's story divides itself into two segments (4:17—11:1 and 11:2—16:20). The first division (part A), in this second major section, focuses on the ministry of Jesus to Israel and the second division's (part B) central point is on Israel's repudiation of Jesus. In the first division of this second section, Matthew's controlling emphasis appears to be Jesus' ministry of teaching, preaching, and healing (4:23; 9:35; 11:1), rather than on the element of clash between Jesus and Israel (leaders and the people), though this element is still present. In this first section (part A) Jesus calls Israel to repentance and announces the Kingdom of Heaven (4:17). But in this second section (11:2—16:20) of the second major division (4:17—16:20), we observe Jesus' anguish of Israel's negative response to Jesus' call of repentance (11:16-19). In concluding this section about Jesus' ministry to Israel, we should observe that Matthew prepares the reader for the conflict that is about to begin.

ESCALATION OF CONFLICT BETWEEN JESUS AND THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN 11:1—16:20

In part "B" of the second major section, the leaders' threat to kill Jesus escalates to the point of their plotting to rid themselves of Him (12:14). This plot is foreshadowed by their accusation of blasphemy in 9:3. But in this latter half (part B) of the second part of Matthew's story, one observes an escalation of conflict. The religious leaders' hostilities are no longer secretive (9:1-8), but their ill will is now one of direct confrontation

[81]Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Story*,
[82]Powell, "Leaders," 217.
[83]Ibid.
[b] Or *in*

over the disciples' picking heads of grain on the Sabbath (12:2-8). Following this showdown, the Pharisees followed Him into *their* synagogues (12:9) seeking to find something to accuse Him of (12:10). The leaders are no longer hesitant to speak to Him directly. To illustrate consider the following encounters:

Matthew 12:9-10

Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, [10]and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"

Matthew 12:38

Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you."

Also, the leaders do not mind criticizing His disciples to His face.

Matthew 12:2

When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath."

Matthew 15:1-2

Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, [2] "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!"

In this second subdivision (part B), we observe the intensity of controversy. Prior to this level of antagonism, interaction was to some extent avoided. But now controversy saturates this section. This is the pattern one detects in 12:2-8, 9-14, 38-45; 15:1-9. This passion of hatred is so great against Jesus that the religious leaders seek His life. Matthew captures this intense dislike with these words: "The Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus" (12:14). In this direct confrontation with Jesus, He twice speaks of eschatological judgment against these leaders (12:22-37, 38-45). Jesus speaks of judgment when they accuse Him of doing His miracles through the prince of demons (Beelzebub); second, He speaks of judgment when they refuse to believe and request another sign.

Jesus and Beelzebub

Matthew 12:36-37

But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. [37] For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.

The Sign of Jonah

Matthew 12:41-42

The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one[a] greater than Jonah is here. [42] The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here.

[a] Or *something*; also in verse 42

These two judgments foreshadow the eschatological judgment that Jesus elaborates in Matthew 24 and 25. This judgment is the same "coming wrath" that John the Baptist forewarned the religious leaders about when they came to him for baptism (3:7-12): "His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (3:12). Jesus again alludes to this judgment in the Parable of the Weeds (13:36-43):

> As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. [41]The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. [42]They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. [43]Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear. (13:40-43)

As stated above, the religious leaders' opposition with Jesus escalates. Following the attack against Jesus in Matthew 12, the demanding leaders plot how they might destroy Him (12:14). The critical leaders are presented to the reader as characters who are "evil" (12:23, 39, 45; 16:4), spiritually blind (12:24, 38, 42; 16:3), hypocritical (12:10; 15:7; 16:10), conniving (12:14), murderous (12:14), unfaithful to God (12:39; 16:4), unrepentant (12:41), and lawless (15:3, 6). In addition to the above, Jesus also likens them to a man possessed by a demon (12:43-45); and they are also pictured as acting in a manner representative of Satan (12:38; 16:1). These are the ones who Jesus warned His disciples about in the Sermon on the Mount (7:15).

Development of the Conflict

In this second major section (4:17—16:20), part B (11:2—16:20), we witness the escalation of conflict. The following is a chronological listing of the various encounters between Jesus and the religious leaders:

- 12:1-8 Plucking Grain on the Sabbath
- 12:9-14 Healing of the Man with a Withered Hand
- 12:22-37 Healing Blind and Dumb Demoniac
- 12:38-45 Demand for a Sign
- 15:1-20 Eating with Defiled Hands
- 16:1-4 Second Demand for a Sign
- 16:5-12 The Leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees

These seven encounters demonstrate the hatred that the religious leaders exhibited toward Jesus. Even with the miracles, they were not persuaded as to the true identity of Jesus. Part B of the second major section is about the repudiation of Jesus' ministry to Israel. As stated in the first major section (1:1—4:16), the identity of Jesus is presented with the climax in God's announcement of who Jesus really is: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (3:17).

Entwined with the motif of repudiation in 11:2—16:20 is also the speculation about the identity of Jesus. The questioning begins with John the Baptist: "When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?'" (11:2-3). Even the crowds question one another: "Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. All the people were astonished and said, 'Could this be the Son of David?'" (12:22-23).

CONFLICTING VIEWS ABOUT THE IDENTITY OF JESUS

As mentioned above, Matthew presented the various viewpoints about Jesus in 1:1-4:16. But in this second part, we are also confronted even more pointedly than in the first part as to the identity of Jesus. It is significant that God in Part One (1:1—4:16), as well as in Part Two (4:17-16:20), breaks into the world of

Matthew with His evaluative point of view about Jesus (3:17; 17:5). This identity of Jesus also permeates, in greater detail, in the third section (16:21—28:20). This identity is of such a controversial nature that Jesus even asked the disciples what people were saying about whom the Son of Man is (16:13).

As a result of Jesus' widespread activity of teaching, preaching, and healing, His fame spreads throughout Palestine and even Syria (4:23-25; 9:36, 31, 33, 35; 11:2, 4; 13:54; 14:1). But in spite all of this fame, we still observe conflicting views about the true identity of Jesus of Nazareth. The reaction to Jesus is mixed. For example, the crowds follow Him (4:24-25; 8:1, 10; 9:33; 12:15; 13:2; 14:13; 15:30-31), but, on the other hand, the religious leaders place Him under scrutiny (9:3, 11, 34). In spite of His fame, in spite of His teaching, in spite of His preaching, and, in spite of His healing, nevertheless, Israel, as a whole, repudiates Him (11:2—12:50). The religious leaders and the crowds do not recognize His true identity.

Towns in Galilee

This conflict is not surprising to Matthew's readers because they had been forewarned (2:3; 3:7-12; 9:3, 11, 14, 34; 10:5-42). Jesus was amazed at the unbelief of so many in their rejection of Him. Jesus renounces the people for their turning away from John and especially Himself (11:16-19). Jesus issues condemnation on the cities of Korazin, Bethsaida (11:20-21), and Capernaum (11:23-24) for their unwillingness to be moved to repentance following His mighty miracles. Even the townspeople of Nazareth were astonished at the teaching of Jesus: "'Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?' And they took offense at him" (13:55-57a).

Herod Antipas

Herod Antipas, having heard news about Jesus, speculates about Him: "At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus, and he said to his attendants, 'This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him'" (14:1-2). Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, inherited Galilee and Perea as his kingdom. He is the one that had previously beheaded John the Baptist at the request of his wife's daughter Herodias (14:3-11). He did not possess the mind of God as to who Jesus really is.

Disciples of Jesus

But in contrast to all these, the disciples having been caught in a storm, watching Jesus walk on water, seeing Peter saved from drowning, and witnessing the calming of the sea (14:24-33), they all proclaimed: "Truly you are the Son of God." (14:33). This correct response is the answer to an earlier question that they had asked when Jesus calms a storm: "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!" (8:27). Matthew concludes this second major section with two evaluative points of view which he juxtaposes, or puts side by side, to each other in order to bring his story to a culmination—Peter's confession near Caesarea Philippi (16:13-20): "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (16:16). Peter's point of view is correct because it is in alignment with God's point of view (3:17; 16:23a). On the other hand, the evaluative viewpoint of the various segments of the Jewish nation is that He is just one of the prophets (16:13-14).

In the second part (4:17—16:20), Matthew tells of Jesus' ministry to Israel (4:17—11:1) and of Israel's response to Him (11:2—16:20). Through His ministry, Jesus summons Israel to repentance and to live in the sphere of God's end-time rule (5:1-8:1). Despite His plea for restoration and acceptance of Himself as the Son of God, some charged Him with blasphemy (9:3). This section consists mainly of Jesus' teaching, preaching, and healing (4:23; 9:35; 11:1).

In the later part of Matthew's story, we observe a change (11:2—16:20). To all intents and purposes, Jesus' ministry is without success. In fact, Israel's response to His ministry is one of repudiation. The religious leaders attack Jesus Himself over the traditions of the elders and seek His life (12:1-8, 9-14; 15:1-9). The

leaders dismiss Him outright as an agent of Satan (9:34; 12:24). The Jewish crowds look upon Him as another prophet (16:13-14).

In contrast to both the crowds and the leaders, the disciples confess Him to be the Messiah Son of God (16:16; 14:33). Still, despite the correctness of their confession, Jesus commands them to silence. They do not yet fully understand that the central task before Him is death upon a cross. Israel is ignorant as to who Jesus is, but the disciples know Him to be the Son of God. Jesus' ministry is without success, at least according to the religious leaders and the crowds. On the other hand, His ministry, in the sight of God, is successful because He accomplished redemption for the sins of the world.

THIRD MAJOR SECTION

16:21—18:20

The Journey to Jerusalem

Matthew begins Section Three with Jesus' prediction about His ultimate fate (crucifixion) by the religious leaders. He writes, "From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life" (Matthew 16:21). We observe that in this explanation of His impending death, Jesus sets forth the concept that His death is necessary ("he must go" or "it is necessary," **δεῖ** (*dei*`). God and Jesus intend this death for the salvation of all humanity (1:21), but, on the other hand, the religious leaders' objective is destruction (12:14). Matthew employs the passion-prediction as another literary device to give cohesion to the third part of his story. He records three references to Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection (16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19).

Prior to these predictions, we recall Peter's confession about Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God (16:16). Following this confession, Jesus warned the disciples "not to tell anyone that he was the Christ." One reason for this silence was that the disciples still did not understand the full mission of Jesus. Again, following the transfiguration of Jesus, the three disciples—Peter, James, and John—were told: "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead" (17:9).

The disciples still did not understand that Jesus had to die for the sins of the world. After Jesus' first announcement about His death, Peter immediately rebuked Jesus: "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" (16:22). Peter still did not understand the Atonement. Jesus then reprimanded Peter for not thinking the "things of God," but rather the "things of men": "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men" (16:23). The readers of Matthew's Gospel would naturally reflect upon Jesus' temptation in the wilderness when Satan also sought to frustrate the scheme of God: "Away from me, Satan!" (4:10). Peter's evaluative point of view did not coincide with that of God's.

Subsequent to this rebuke by Jesus, we find three of Jesus' disciples with Him on the Mountain. In the transfiguration of Jesus, God gives His viewpoint concerning the identity of His Son and the necessity of the death of His Son. Earlier, it is recalled that God entered into the world as actor and gave His testimony. Matthew records this intervention: "And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (3:17). In this second revelation of God's point of view, He adds an additional statement: "Listen to him!" (17:5). On the way back to Jerusalem, as stated above, Jesus informs the disciples of His impending death (16:21), but Peter says "no" (16:22). On the Mount, God says, "Listen to Him!" They were to listen to His warnings about His impending death (16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19).

Following the confession of Peter in Caesarea Philippi and the Mount of Transfiguration scene, Jesus and His disciples enter Galilee. Upon entering this territory, Jesus for the second time tells them of His impending death: "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life" (17:22-23). We can still hear the echo of God's voice: "Listen to Him!" They were to receive that which God had ordained—suffering and death in Jerusalem. Yet, the disciples still would

not understand the implications of this death until after the resurrection: "As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, 'Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead'" (17:9). The disciples did not fully understand these events until Jesus met with them after the resurrection and explained the "things of God":

> He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." [45]Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. [46]He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, [47]and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. [48] You are witnesses of these things.˜ (Luke 24:44-48)

When Jesus completed His work in this area (Galilee), He started toward Jerusalem (Matthew 20:17). He took His disciples apart privately and, again for the third time explained the "things of God": "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the Law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!" (20:18-19).

From the border of Jericho, Jesus journeys in the direction of Jerusalem and arrives at the Mount of Olives (21:1). The events that now transpire are shrouded in the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. Israel receives Jesus into Jerusalem as the Son of David (21:9). When the inhabitants of Jerusalem inquired of the crowds as to whom this Jesus is, the people replied: "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee" (21:11). This confession of the crowds is similar to the remarks of the disciples concerning the identity of Jesus as reported by the people: "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." To the people, Jesus is no more than a prophet, even though they spoke of Him as the Son of David. Israel still did not understand God's evaluative viewpoint about Jesus.

Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem marked the beginning of the end of His conflict with the religious leaders. His actions caused the religious leaders to engage Him in direct confrontation over His course of actions. Jesus attacked the seat of their power: "My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers'" (21:13). Jesus launches a massive assault upon their authority and integrity (21:12-13). This action paves the way for the thorny controversies with the religious leaders leading up to His crucifixion. As Jesus debates and speaks in parables, the tension between Him and the religious leaders reach a breaking point (21:12-23:39).

The confrontation with Jesus widens to the point that it includes representatives of all the groups in Jerusalem:

- Chief priests and the scribes (21:15)
- Chief priests and the elders of the people (21:23)
- The disciples of the Pharisees along with the Herodians (22:15-16)
- The Sadducees (22:23)
- A lawyer from the Pharisees (22:24-35)

Following these confrontational episodes, Jesus Himself closes the series by challenging the Pharisees:

> "The son of David," they replied. [43] He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says, [44] "'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet." '[b] [45] If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?" [46] No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions. (Matthew 22:22-46)

After Jesus silences the leaders in debate, then the religious leaders leave the scene of the temple. Alone with the crowds and the disciples, He delivers a piercing chastisement against the religiosity of the religious

[b] Psalm 110:1

leaders. This scathing rebuke is reminiscent of His stern disapproval of the sanctimonious leaders in His Sermon on the Mount: "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (5:20).

Jesus begins His ministry with an analysis of their teachings and ends His ministry with another stinging condemnation of their ethical behavior. Jesus issues seven woes directed against their conduct (Chapter 23). Following this indictment of the rigid leaders for their shallow display of piety, He then proceeds to speak of God's judgment upon the nation of Israel (Chapter 24). This entire chapter is about God's eschatological judgment upon the nation, upon the unscrupulous shepherds, and upon the Temple. He then speaks three parables—The Parable of the Ten Virgins, The Parable of the Talents, and The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats—against the over-bearing leaders of Israel for their pretense of virtue (Chapter 25).

After concluding these three parables of judgment, Jesus again brings to the attention of His disciples the impending death that awaits Him by the chief priest and elders of the people (26:1-5). The leaders demonstrate their rejection of His parables by their plotting to put Him to death. The corrupt leaders rejected God's identity of Jesus Messiah as His Son (3:17; 17:5). Their evaluative viewpoint is not the "things of God," but rather, the "things of men."

Jesus now informs His disciples, after their request about the Passover, that it is time to prepare the Passover meal (26:1). It is during this meal that Jesus gives a glimmer of information as to what His death is all about: "Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins"' (26:27-28). Following this Supper, the political machinery starts to roll in its intensity for His crucifixion. Immediately upon His arrest, He is taken before the Sanhedrin (26:57-67), before Pilate (27:11-26), and then the soldiers mock Jesus (27:27-31). Matthew then describes in accelerated movement the events of the crucifixion (27:32-44), the death of Jesus (27:45-55), the burial of Jesus (27:57-66), the resurrection of Jesus (28:1-10), the guards' report (28:11-15), and finally the instructions of Jesus to His disciples about making disciples (28:16-20).

CONCLUSION

The third major division of Matthew's Gospel (16:21-28:20) is honeycombed with confrontations with the religious leaders. Beginning with Matthew 16:21, we observe an escalation of the "powers that be" to get rid of Jesus. The religious leaders are so cunning in their attack against Jesus that even the crowds are taken in by their hypocrisy (27:20). No wonder Jesus warned His disciples on two different occasions to "Watch out for false prophets" (Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24). The first warning followed Jesus' rebuke of the religious leaders' theology (Matthew 5-6) and the second and third warnings occurred following His seven woes (Matthew 23) against the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. The false prophets in the Gospel of Matthew refer, so it appears, to the religious leaders. Throughout the ministry of Jesus, He scrutinizes the unethical behavior of the leaders. Conflict with the leaders of Israel permeates the whole of Matthew's Gospel.

This chapter ("A Literary Analysis of the Gospel of Matthew") has analyzed the three major divisions in the Gospel of Matthew. Throughout the three sections (1:1—4:16; 4:17—16:20; 16:21-28:20) of Matthew's Gospel, the identity of Jesus permeates all three divisions. In these three divisions, we observe that conflict abounds from the beginning to end. To begin with, Matthew foreshadows this disunity but in the ministry of John the Baptist, we observe direct confrontation. Jesus begins His ministry with an analysis of the religious leaders' concept of God's righteousness, and He concludes His ministry with His analysis of the religious leaders' characteristics (Chapters 24 and 25). The antagonism of the leaders of Israel against Jesus begins in the second major section. But in Part A we observe, not direct confrontation, but indirect confrontation. On the other hand, in Part B we observe an escalation of the quarrels with Jesus by the leaders—it is now direct. In the third major section (16:21—28:20), this animosity against Jesus reaches its climax on the part of the leaders in the crucifixion of Jesus.

This chapter is the background for the next chapter (3) entitled "False Teachers." Unfortunately, it is necessary to call attention to the erroneous use of "false teachers" by many sincere and godly men and women. Since this book deals with old texts through new eyes, it is necessary, at least in the tenor of this book, to

evaluate the “old” way of interpretation, that is to say, our interpretation without regard to context versus, or in opposition to, the “new” way, that is, the interpreter focuses upon the context in making our determination as to the teaching of any text, not just Matthew 7:15.

Since I live in Montgomery and have a ministry among those within the Churches of Christ, I decided that I would illustrate the abuse of this Scripture by some Churches of Christ in Montgomery as well as the mishandling of many other texts by countless devout believers within the various Churches of Christ journals. My objective in this book is not to condemn godly men and women, but rather, it is my goal to help Christians from all fellowships of the Resurrected One to learn to read the Word of God more accurately in order to maintain the unity for which Jesus prayed (John 17). Even though I deal with the ill-treatment of this text (Matthew 7:15) by many within the Churches of Christ, we can still learn much about how to interpret the Word of God apart from our own religious affiliation.

3

False Teachers

One of the main principles of the Protestant Reformation was that of *sola Scriptura*—the sole authority of Scripture in questions of faith. The Reformers themselves did not agree on the scope and application of that principle. Some, like Luther, meant by it that anything which was contrary to the clear words of Scripture should be rejected, while traditions that did not contradict the Bible could—and normally should—be retained. Zwingli and others went much farther and sought to do away with anything that was not clearly supported by Scripture. But in spite of these differences, all agreed that the reason why the Reformation was needed was that, to a greater or lesser degree, the tradition of the church made it difficult, if not impossible to read the Bible correctly.[84]

PRESENT CRISIS WITHIN THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST

Tradition is still making it difficult for Christians to read the Bible correctly. As a result of the foothold that custom has within many Churches of Christ as well as other Christian fellowships is hopelessly divided over opinions. These divisions are deep and wide. Issues are so hotly debated that for one to disagree with the status quo of a particular group is to call down upon one's head the epithet—"false teacher." The lines of demarcation are tearing the distinctive fellowship of God's people known as the Churches of Christ[85] into many warring factions. The heart of all the confusion is over pattern theology,[86] which focuses on the methodology of how to conduct a worship service on Sunday morning with its five-acts. Each group basically has its own agenda.[87] This chapter is a brief summary of the conflict within the Churches of Christ in its identification of

[84]Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980), 29.

[85]Some within the Churches of Christ deny that this movement is a denomination. The word *denomination* is usually assigned to other religious bodies, which epithet means that Baptist, Methodist, and so on, are not members of the body of Christ. The word *denomination* simply means to give a name to, that is to say, denominate. The Stone/Campbell movement understood the import of the word *denomination*. For an admission that the Church of Christ is a denomination in the same sense as all other religious bodies, see a comment by Alexander Campbell, one of the originators of the Stone/Campbell Movement. He wrote, as early as 1840, to a Baptist scholar, Andrew Broaddus, whom he called brother, about his concern over the written history of the Reformation Movement:

> Whenever the history of this effort at reformation shall have been faithfully written, it will appear, we think, bright as the sun, that our career has been marked with a spirit of forbearance, moderation, and love of union with an unequivocal desire for preserving the integrity, harmony, and co-operation of all who teach one faith, one Lord, and one immersion. In confirmation of this fact I am happy to add that no Baptist of good character for piety and morality, has ever been, because of a diverse theory or opinion, excluded from our communion or communities. . . . We, as a *denomination*, are as desirous as ever to unite and co-operate with all Christians on the broad and vital principles of the New and everlasting Covenant. Alexander Campbell, "The Editor's Response to Mr. Broaddus," *Millennial Harbinger*, New Series, 4, no. XII (December 1840): 556.

[86]"Pattern theology" is equivalent to the "regulative principle of worship" among the Presbyterians.

[87]To illustrate, for example confusion that exists within one of the major divisions within the Churches of Christ—the one-cup and non-Sunday school church—see Dallas Burdette, "A Brief History of the One-Cup and Non-Sunday School Movement" in *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood, Florida: Xulon, 2008), 27-54. This chapter details the

false prophets/teachers in Matthew's Gospel. Even though this study focuses upon the divisions within this once united body of believers, nevertheless, the problem of sectarianism abounds in other religious bodies—Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and so on.

Country-wide Dissension

The Churches of Christ today are experiencing change that is causing some churches to level the harmful charge of false prophets/teachers against those who turn aside from long defended cherished traditions (traditionalism). Again, as in the Reformation, our heritage has made it difficult for us to interpret the written Word accurately. Traditions are often equated with the Word of God itself. Leroy Garrett (1918-2015), professor and author, points out:

> People tire of our equating *our* understanding of the word of God with the word of God itself. This is to say that we must distinguish between revelation and interpretation. Revelation is what God has given us in scripture. Interpretation is what we conclude the scriptures to mean. One is divine, the other human.[88]

Many Christians can no longer distinguish between the interpretation of the interpretative community and the Word of God itself. It is in this vein of orthodoxy that Stafford North, former Academic Dean and Executive vice President of Oklahoma Christian University (served in this capacity for thirty-eight years and retired in 1994),[89] forewarns against change, but this, too, is based upon his own interpretative community.[90] North points out in defense of his position that "Paul, John, Jesus and others in the New Testament forbid anyone to change or vary from this teaching. Jesus warned of false teachers and spoke of those in judgment who thought they were His but would be turned away because he 'never knew them'" (Matthew 7:15-20).[91]

North cites many Scriptures to justify his negative position of turnabout within the Churches of Christ, but upon closer analysis of the Scriptures he cites, the evidence does not appear to support his judgment of indictment. We do not deny the Scriptures he relies upon to teach that we should not depart from the teachings of Jesus, but rather we reject his application of those Scriptures to maintain the status quo within his own interpretative community.

Each interpretative community advances its own brand of orthodoxy. There are approximately twenty-five divisions within the Churches of Christ, each one postulating its own trademark of conformity. The history of the Churches of Christ is riddled with conflict and division over peripheral issues. It is in this same vein of disharmony within the Churches of Christ that Richard H. Niebuhr (1894-1962), one of the most important Christian theological-ethicists in the 20th century America, addresses the subject of hostility within Christendom itself in his own day. He is correct when he concisely captures the very essence of exclusiveness through teaching the history of the church.

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many oddities advanced by the many divisions within this one-cup and non-Sunday school movement. Pattern theology is what the divisions are mainly fought over.

[88]Leroy Garrett, "It Means What It Says," *Restoration Review* 17, no. 4 (April 1975): 69.

[89]See http://www.oc.edu/faculty/stafford.north for this information, accessed on 7-23-2008.

[90]For an interpretation of the "interpretative community," see Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980), 171, where he says,

> Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions. In other words, these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around. . . . The first community will accuse the members of the second of being reductive, and they in turn will call their accusers superficial. The assumption in each community will be that the other is not correctly perceiving the "true text," but the truth will be that each perceives the text (or texts) its interpretive strategies demand and call into being.

[91]Stafford North, "How To Be Undenominational In A Denominational World," in Jim Sheerer and Charles L. Williams, eds., *Directions for the Road Ahead: Stability in Change Among Churches of Christ* (Chickasha, Oklahoma: Yeomen Press, 1998), 207.

> The teaching of church history is sometimes made the occasion for developing a sense of alienation from other groups rather than for developing a sense of unity. Like every other history, it is used at times to promote indoctrination in a peculiar tenet. Yet fundamentally and generally it is taught as church history.[92]

Exclusiveness is still the trademark of many denominations, not just the Churches of Christ. Having said this, this alienation reached a climax for some within the Churches of Christ in the 1960s. In 1966, for instance, seventeen men and women voiced their concern for change within the Churches of Christ.[93] They sought to develop a sense of unity within this divided movement. The concern of these Christians shook the establishment and reverberated throughout the Churches of Christ with fear of the unknown. Many were coming out of Plato's cave.[94] They were no longer seeing shadows, but they were seeing reality. Robert Myers in analyzing the tension build-up writes in his "Introduction" the following scenario that describes the purpose of the book:

> Some of us within the Church of Christ segment of the Restoration movement, and some recently out of it, have felt it imperative to analyze its failures. This anthology of essays is a criticism of a religious way of life. It is written by men who have remained within the Church of Christ, or by those who have felt they had to seek wider fellowship but still love dearly the people they left behind.[95]

Since the publication of *Voices of Concern* (1966), many leaders have repudiated the narrow-mindedness within many Churches of Christ. And, as a result of rethinking ritualistic worship positions (five acts) once held, many are now advancing the concept that God has not ordained a ritualistic worship service with five acts and also that God has a larger fellowship than just those within the Churches of Christ.[96] Thus, crises exist within the churches, and this call for change is working havoc among those who seek to stifle variation in the so-called worship service. For those seeking more freedom in their gatherings, they often suffer ostracism by other Christians.[97] Neal Pryor, former Vice President for Academic Affairs and Professor of Bible at Harding University, is correct when he writes: "There is hardly a congregation in our brotherhood that is not feeling the pressure for change. This trend can be a great benefit in that it calls us to re-examine what is really essential for us to keep and what are traditions that can and perhaps should be changed."[98]

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[92]H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), 15.

[93]Robert Meyers, ed., *Voices of Concern* (Saint Louis, Missouri: Mission Messenger, 1966).

[94]Plato, "The Simile of the Cave," in *Plato: The Republic*, translated with an Introduction by Desmond Lee (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 255-264; see also David Melling, *Understanding Plato* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 97-113.

[95]Myers, *Voices of Concern*, 1.

[96]For an excellent discussion of the so-called five acts of worship between Buff Scott and Gary Workman, see Buff Scott. Jr., "Acts of Worship," *The Reformer* 9, no. 5 (Sept-Oct 1993): 3-7. See also Mike Root, *Split Grape Juice: Rethinking the Worship Tradition* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 1992); Mike Root, *UnBroken Bread: Healing, Worship, Wounds* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 1997).

[97]See, for example, Don L. King, " Proper Perspective," *Old Paths Advocate* LXVII, no. 9 (September 1995): 2, where he expresses his rejection of those who do not conform to his interpretative community's stance on one-cup and non-Sunday school beliefs.

> Why do we worship with one cup? Answer: because we read it plainly in Matthew 26:27; Mark 14:23; Luke 22:17-20; 1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:25-28. Is it wrong, sinful, to use more than one? Answer: yes, because more than one cup violates the examples given in these verses, it violates the command for us to do as Jesus did, "this do ye. . . . " (1 Corinthians 11:25), etc., etc. Listen brethren: we believe it is wrong to use more than one cup. We believe people are going to be lost for using more than one cup. Surely, we believe that! If people are not going to be lost for using more than one, then let's give up the fight and heal the division caused by those who have insisted on using more than one. If it is wrong to use more than one cup in the Lord's Supper I can't worship with those who use more than one. If I can't worship with them I can't fellowship them and I can't fellowship you if you do! Is that simple? [sic].

[98]Neale T. Pryor, "The Essentials of the Faith: What Cannot Change," in *Church Unity: Stability & Flexibility in the Church*, 1995 Preacher's Forum, Harding University, Graduate School of Religion, ed. Donald Kinder (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1995), 33.

Curtis Cates (1941-2013), former Director of the Memphis School of Preaching and co-editor of *Yokefellow*, laments the fact that many within the Churches of Christ are no longer "set courageously for the defense of the Truth."[99] Again, he says, "Liberalism is an enemy of the light of God's Word, the absolute and knowable Truth (2 Tim. 3:14-17)."[100] He then identifies two men (Rubel Shelly and Randy Harris) within the Churches of Christ as associated with "the liberal, modernistic human philosophies."[101] These two men published a book to call attention to many of the traditions within the Churches of Christ that Christians should no longer adhere.[102] Cates complains that "Brethren Harris and Shelly propose to give us 'a theology for the 21st century church' (p. xiii); they will 'reexamine the foundation' (p. xiv)."[103] Once more, he calls attention to the urgency of stopping "The mouths of false witnesses."[104] He believes that these two men are attacking the truth.[105] He then relies upon 2 John 9-11 to justify separation and ostracism from these two men.[106]

Two years after the publication of the above book, Cates wrote another book in which he refers to Rubel Shelly by citing the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:15: "Jesus warned, 'Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves. By their fruits ye shall know them' (Mat. 7:15-16)."[107] In 1990, C. Leonard Allen published a book[108] that also caused him to come under "fire" from Cates as a false prophet. Cates accuses Allen of disrespect for the Word and also charges him with treating the Word as "unrealistic" and "fairy tale-like." Cates writes with hyper-critical judgment against Allen:

> In other words, what brethren did was fairy tale-like and unrealistic; one cannot know what Truth is, and to think he can is to merely dream. Is that what Christ commanded when He said, "Beware of false prophets . . . " (Mat. 7:15), or when He warned, "But in vain do they worship me, Teaching [sic] as their doctrines the precepts of men" (Mat. 15:9), or "Let them [false teachers and their religions] alone: they are blind guides" (Mat. 15:14), or what Paul meant when he charged, ". . . to whom we gave place in the way of subjection, no, not for an hour" (Gal. 2:5).[109]

In 1996, Jim Waldron, another patternist, wrote an article in which he, also, took to task the theology of Shelly and Harris. He, too, bemoans the fact that the teachings of Shelly and Harris have infiltrated the mission fields.[110] He further castigates these men by citing articles by Choate,[111] also patternistic in his theology, in which he says,

> He is also demonstrating how false teachers in this generation are seeking to do the same thing in some of our schools. Also, the *Firm Foundation* has over the last five years documented much of the current digressive movement coming out of Abilene Christian University.[112]

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[99]Curtis Cates, *The Second Incarnation: A Pattern for Apostasy* (Memphis, Tennessee: Cates Publication, 1992), 18. Cates resigned his position on March 27, 2007 and accepted his new position as Director Emeritus of the Memphis School of Preaching (www.msop.org, accessed on 7-23-08).

[100]Ibid., 19.

[101]Ibid.

[102]See Rubel Shelly and Randall J. Harris, *The Second Incarnation: A Theology for the 21st Century Church* (West Monroe, Louisiana: Howard Publishing Co., 1992).

[103]Cates, *Incarnation*, 20.

[104]Ibid.

[105]Ibid.

[106]Ibid., 25-27. For an excellent and detailed study on 2 John 9, see also Carl Ketcherside, "Receive Him Not," *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 6 (June 1965): 81-90. See also Chapter 11 of this book (*Old Texts through New Eyes*) for an examination of this much-debated text.

[107]Curtis Cates, *The "Core/Bull's Eye Gospel" Concept Refuted: Shall We Have a New "Cultural Church"?* (Memphis, Tennessee: Cates Publication, 1994), 15.

[108]C. Leonard Allen, *The Cruciform Church: Becoming a Cross-Shaped People in a Secular World* (Texas: Abilene Christian University Press, 1990).

[109]Cates, *Concept Refuted*, 38, 39.

[110]Jim Waldron, "False Teaching Comes to Mission Field," *Firm Foundation* 111, no. 9 (September 1996): 13.

[111]For an example of the five-acts of worship by Choate, see J. C. Choate, *Gospel Sermonnettes* (Winona, MS: J. C. Choate Publications, 1993), 102-104.

[112]Waldron, "False Teaching Comes to Mission Field," Firm *Foundation*, 13. For additional reading in this same vein, see Jim Laws, Lectureship director, *The Restoration: The Winds of Change*, Eighteenth Annual Spiritual Sword Lectureship [October 17-

This present crisis within the Churches of Christ involves the concept of pattern theology.[113] Pattern theology, as stated above, is the belief that God has ordained a prescribed ritual to be performed on Sunday morning in a prescribed manner in order for there to be "worship in Spirit and truth." Waldron calls attention to ten men that do not advance the so-called five acts of worship, also known as pattern theology. Waldron, as he cites Choate, states the matter firmly:

> Brother Goebel Music in 1991 published *Behold The Pattern*, in which he meticulously documented the uncertain sounds of ten preachers and/or college professors. These men are: Max Lucado, San Antonio, Texas; Stephen Taylor, former professor of Abilene Christian University, who is now in England; Larry James, Plano, Texas; Rick Atchley, Fort Worth, Texas; Randy Fenter, San Antonio, Texas; Jim Hackney, Fort Worth, Texas; Jeff Walling, Mission Viejo, Calif.; Randy Mayeux, Dallas, Texas; Rubel Shelly, Nashville, Tenn.; and Denny Boultinghouse, West Monroe, La.[114]

Just a perusal of the books and religious journals reveals the prevailing crisis that crystallizes around this expression (five acts): For example, Garland Elkins, Dean of Public Relations in the Memphis School of Preaching, asserts:

> There is a true worship. Jesus said, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Without hesitation, we affirm that worship to God under the New Testament consists of preaching (Acts 20:7), the Lord's supper (Acts 20:7), singing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16), praying (Acts 2:42), and the giving of our means (1 Cor. 16:1-2). These five acts are the only authorized acts of worship to God.[115]

LOCAL DISSENSION IN MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA

The Churches of Christ in Montgomery are experiencing turmoil with unparalleled consequences—disunity. The former Seibles Road Church of Christ[116] in Montgomery published a weekly bulletin to call attention to apostasy—defection as defined by the Seibles Road Church of Christ's "interpretative community."[117] This bulletin printed articles by various authors to call attention to those who are so-called false prophets/teachers within the Churches of Christ.

The late O. B. Porterfield (1932-2005),[118] former pulpit minister for the Seibles Road Church of Christ, republished, in his November 3, 1996 bulletin an article written (originally written on September 25, 1996) by Ray Dutton, a former member of the Landmark Church of Christ. The Dutton article is prefaced with some remarks by O. B. Porterfield in which he reminds his readers that in May 1994 that he wrote about Buddy Bell and Joe Beam's appearance on Faulkner University's "Focus." His Preface is titled: "Buddy Bell Returns to

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21, 1993] (Memphis, TN: Getwell Church of Christ, 1993); Dave Miller, *Piloting the Strait: A Guidebook for Assessing Change in Churches of Christ* (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 1996); and William Woodson, *Change Agents and Churches of Christ: A Study In Contemporary problems With Change Agents Among Churches of Christ* (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 1994).

[113]For a detailed study of the oddities in pattern theology, see Dallas Burdette, *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative* (Longwood, FL: Xulon, 2008), 55-86.

[114]Ibid. For a detailed study and approval of this concept of pattern theology (five acts), see Goebel Music, *Behold the Pattern* (Colleyville, Texas: Goebel Music Publication, 1991), 393-394. See also Cates, *Incarnation*, 27-28.

[115]Garland Elkins, "Foreword," in Cates, *Concept Refuted*, 12-13.

[116]This congregation folded shortly after the retirement of O. B. Porterfield in 2000.

[117]This bulletin is in the Dallas Burdette's collection of books and journals, which is located in the library of Amridge University, Montgomery, AL.

[118]It is not my intention to castigate the various names mentioned in this chapter. My objective is to call attention to the predicament that the body of Christ experiences because of a lack of understanding as to what the heart of God's Gospel is all about. Most of the sources cited in this chapter occurred in the past; nevertheless, the problems still exists within many Churches of Christ throughout the Untied States as well as other parts of the world. My book (Old Texts through New Eyes) examines many of the Scriptures still cited by many God-fearing believers to maintain separation from other sincere believers. One objective of this book is to help Christians learn how to read the Word of God in context. Unfortunately, many Churches of Christ still adhere to the views set forth by O. B. Porterfield.

Montgomery."[119] In this "Preface," he expresses sorrow that his efforts were futile. He could not prevent these two men from appearing on Faulkner University's lectureship.

In the third paragraph of Dutton's letter to the elders of the Landmark Church of Christ, he says, "Recently, I became very upset about the scheduling of a known false teacher to speak to our young people."[120] Dutton continues in this letter to speak of Bell's association with other known false teachers: "Though I was well aware that Buddy had a reputation for keeping company with a number of known false teachers, I had hoped that he was personally committed to the truth of God."[121] He then cites Matthew 7:15 in warning the family at Landmark about Buddy Bell now minister of the Landmark congregation.[122] He writes of the danger of the souls at the Landmark Church of Christ.

> I would give up my family at Landmark and never return if that alone would save the many precious souls here who are now gravely in danger from a man I now believe is a false teacher "secretly brought in" (Gal. 2:4), who has come to God's flock in "sheep's clothing" (Mt. 7:15) but is in truth a "ravenous wolf."[123]

Matthew 7:15 is cited by Dutton as applicable to Bell. Dutton relates a series of questions that he presented to Bell in order to elicit from him his feelings about:

> (1) 'BAPTISM,' (2) 'INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC and DENOMINATIONALISM,' (3) 'SOLOS, CHOIRS, QUARTETS AND OTHER SPECIAL MUSIC,' (4) 'THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH,' (5) 'HONESTY WITH THE BRETHREN,' AND (6) 'FELLOWSHIP WITH THE DENOMINATIONS.'[124]

As a result of this encounter, Dutton then cites Titus 3:10 and combines this Scripture with 2 John 9-11 to justify his characterization of Bell as a false teacher. Joe Beam,[125] another minister who calls for reflection upon traditionalism, came under attack again by Jerry C. Brewer. Brewer cited Romans 16:17-18, 2 John 9-11, and Ephesians 5:11 to uphold his belief that Beam is a false teacher.[126] Philip Black,[127] former minister for the Carriage Hills Church of Christ in Montgomery, Al., also received a reprimand from Porterfield[128] and, at the same time, he also received the epithet of false teacher from Armond Hoover. Hoover expresses his concern over Black's influence within the Churches of Christ and then labels him as a false teacher.

> Your shallowness is showing, Brother Black. Brother O. B. and all other knowledgeable and understanding Christians know that only God can and will condemn the disobedient to His Will. However the righteous and obedient are commanded to (and will) warn and mark all false teachers and the disobedient (Rom. 16:17-18), beware of false prophets in sheep's clothing (Matt. 7:15-16) (or be aware – A.H.). A warning, Grievous wolves (false teachers—A. H.) will enter among us, not sparing the flock, even our own selves to draw away (deceive – A.H.) disciples after them (Acts 20:29-30).[129]

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[119]O. B. Porterfield, "Buddy Bell Returns to Montgomery," *Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (November 3, 1996): 1.

[120]Ray Dutton, "To: The Elders of the Landmark church of Christ," *Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (November 3, 1996): 1.

[121]Ibid.

[122]As of July 17, 2008, Buddy Bell is still the pulpit minister of this congregation.

[123]Ibid., 2.

[124]Ibid., 3. This citation appears in all caps in the original.

[125]Joe Beam was a former pulpit minister for the Carriage Hills Church of Christ—formerly called Family of God (F.O.G.)—in the city of Montgomery, AL. Today, 2008, this congregation is known as Grace Pointe Church of Christ. Scotty Harris is the senior minister (August 2002 to present). See http://www.grace-pointe.com for information on this fellowship (accessed on 7-23-2008)

[126]Jerry C. Brewer, "Oklahoma Brethren Issue Warning That Is On The 'Beam,'" Seibles *Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (February 2, 1997): 2.

[127]At the time of this attack by Porterfield, Philip Black was pulpit minister for the Carriage Hills Church of Christ, which is now, as stated above, known as Grace Pointe.

[128]O. B. Porterfield, "A Reader Responds And Speaks Out!," *Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (January 19, 1997): 1. Philip Black is now (2008) one of the shepherds of Grace Pointe Church of Christ, formally Carriage Hills Church of Christ.

[129]Armond Hoover, "Dear Philip Black," Ibid., 2. This article also criticizes unity in diversity and recommends Goebel Music's book, *Behold the Pattern* (Colleyville, TX: Goebel Music Publications, 1991). For a counter position of Hoover's negative

The third Church of Christ to come under attack in Montgomery was the Vaughn Park Church of Christ. Mark Smith, at the time of the attack, was the pulpit minister for this congregation.[130] On July 13, 1997, Porterfield lashed out against all three congregations (Landmark, Carriage Hills, and Vaughn Park) for their participation in a lectureship called "Jubilee." He wrote: "BUDDY BELL, minister at Landmark, and PHILIP BLACK, minister at the F.O.G (Family of God, Carriage Hills Church of Christ), were on the program and Vaughn Park Church of Christ advertised and encouraged people to attend this gathering of heretics."[131] In another bitter article, Porterfield cited Matthew 7:15 as applicable to Mark Smith: "We proved his error by the scriptures. Matt. 7:1-5 condemns harsh judgment, but a judgment must be made according to Matt. 7:15-16. John 7:24 command [sic] righteous judgement according to the Word of God, Psa. 119:172."[132]

These citations from the *Seibles Road Church of Christ* bulletin illustrate the crises and mindset that still exist in the city of Montgomery. I have reviewed various issues of this bulletin in order to preserve this history and to demonstrate the turmoil and confusion that exist within this once united body of believers. As we peruse the back issues of this now defunct bulletin, we observe, almost without exception, that every page of this paper summons the same Scriptures to justify separation from those who do not explain the Word of God as they were interpreted by this particular "interpretative community," namely, the Seibles Road Church of Christ. This brief review of the contemporary situation of division within the Churches of Christ in Montgomery calls for a reexamination of how to interpret and understand Scripture in light of its context. As of today (2008), three congregations of the Churches of Christ in Montgomery are still on the blacklist of the more conservative Churches of Christ.

CONCLUSION

This chapter examined the controversy within the Churches of Christ as to who is or who is not a false teacher. Journals and books were called forth to illustrate the confusion that exists among so many devout Christians. It was observed that Christians often tag other Christians as misleading teachers when anyone dares to go against the grain of the intelligence of the religious leaders in certain "interpretative communities." We are confronted with the question: Is deformity in comprehension in and of itself sufficient grounds for the epithet of false teacher/prophet? We must determine who is and who is not a counterfeit teacher from Scripture, not tradition.

The question is, is one a sham teacher simply because one believes in instrumental music, handclapping in the assembly, solo singing, Sunday schools, individual communion cups, orphan homes, Bible colleges, and so on? Since Jesus warns against imitation prophets (Matthew 7:15, 24:11, 24), we do have a responsibility to identify those who come under this classification. We must recognize a false teacher through a correct application of Scripture, not through the traditions of men. The Word of God alone is the criterion that can assist us in making this determination.

The perusal of the various Church of Christ journals revealed that certain Scriptures were relied upon to justify separation from other believers. Two Scriptures cited were 2 John 9 and Matthew 7:15.[133] Many writers,

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statements about unity in diversity, see Carl Ketcherside, "The Spirit and Unity," *Mission Messenger* 25, no. 7 (July 1963): 97-112 [1-16].

[130]See David Hester, "OFF THE MARK," *Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (May 18, 1997): 1, for his castigation of Mark Smith as a false teacher as well as a host of others labeled as false teachers. Today (2008), Brad Sullivan is the preaching minister.

[131]This commentary (comments) by Porterfield is written in support of an article written by Robert Dodson, "The Move to Unite With Denominationalists," *Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (July 13, 1997): 2.

[132]These comments are in response to an article written by Clifton D. Kelly, "Worrying Too Much about Error?," *Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (December 21, 1997): 2.

[133]See C. A. Smith, "Special Music," *Old Paths Advocate* LXVV, no. 3 (March 1996): 4-5; Mike McDanie, "The Right Hand of Fellowship," part 2, *The Light* 27, no. 1 (January 1996): 3-6; Carl Johnson, "The Trojan Horse in the Church," *Old Paths Advocate* LXVV, no. 2 (February 1996): 1, 7-8; James Meadows, "Does the New Testament Represent a Pattern to Follow?" *Firm Foundation* 110, no. 12 (December 1995): 8-10; Stan Cox, "Is Sincerity Sometimes Enough?" *Guardian of Truth* XXXIX, no. 8 (April 20, 1995):

in order to uphold their practice of ostracism, cited these verses to justify their narrow perception of fellowship among other Christians.

Chapter 4 explores the conditions in the first century that Jesus encountered from the religious leaders. Jesus faced two hundred years of traditions, which traditions made void God's Word. Today, Christians, at least from a Church of Christ background, face two-hundred years of traditions. Christendom, as a whole, face over five-hundred years of traditions inherited from the Reformation Movement. Many sincere believers within the Churches of Christ labor under the impression that they are not influenced by tradition, which notion is totally wrong. Leonard Allen's and Richard Hughes' comments upon this mindset disarm such impression:

> But this call brings a subtle but powerful temptation. It lures us into thinking that we can escape history and tradition entirely, blotting out the centuries that have passed and erasing all their effects. Such a process leads us to overlook our weaknesses, to think that we are something we are not, and ultimately to deny the fact that we, too, are mere mortals shaped by time and culture like everyone else.
>
> Furthermore, when our spiritual ancestors denied any complicity in human traditions and claimed to be only a people of the Book, they partook of a profound and longstanding irony. In their zeal to reject tradition, they actually became part of a long tradition in Christian history whose substance was rejection of tradition. While imagining that they stood alone, they actually stood shoulder to shoulder with Zwinglians, Puritans, Baptist, and others who also imagined they stood alone. This book focuses on that long Christian tradition created by those who claimed to have not tradition.
>
> Those of us who stand within the powerful tradition have tended to follow suit. While claiming to reject all human traditions, we have created and perpetuated traditions all the more entrenched for being unrecognized. Rather than escaping tradition, we who are the heirs of Barton Stone, Alexander Campbell, and David Lipscomb simply have failed to recognize the traditions at work in our midst.[134]

Just a cursory reading of this chapter reveals the dilemma that believers in Christ find themselves in. There are approximately twenty-five or more divisions just within the Churches of Christ. On the other hand, the Baptists, the Methodist, the Presbyterians, and many other denominations are divided over traditions, which traditions are often associated with the Word of God itself. The purpose of the next chapter (4) is to call attention to the role that religious leaders play in maintaining the traditions of the forefathers. One objective of this present chapter (3) as well as the next chapter (4) is to call attention to our need to reexamine old texts through new eyes.

21-22; Tom M. Roberts, "Romans 14: Satan's Trojan Horse for Fellowship with Error," *Guardian of Truth* XXXIX, no. 4 (February 16, 1995): 110-113 [12-17]; Don Walker, "Second John 9 in Light of Context," *The Restorer* (May/June 1989): 11-14; Jerry Moffitt, "Why I Don't Have Fellowship With Denominational 'Pastors' and Catholic Priests," *Contending for the Faith* XXVI, no. 8 (August 1995): 1, 3-6; William Woodson, "The Doctrine of Christ," *The Spiritual Sword* 22, no. 3 (April 1991): 35-38; Roy Deaver, "Who 'Splits the Log'?" *The Spiritual Sword* 15, no. 1 (October 1983):11-13; Garland Elkins (1926-2015), '"Receive Him Not'—II John 9-11," *The Spiritual Sword* 5, no. 2 (January 1974): 31-34.

[134]C. Leonard Allen and Richard T. Hughes, *Discovering Our Roots: The Ancestry of Churches of Christ* (Abilene, Texas: ACU Press, 1988), 3. I highly recommend this book. This book is a brief overview of the ancestry of the Churches of Christ.

4

Political Power of the Pharisees

Orthodox Judaism is not simply "Old Testament theology without Jesus." It is the religion of "You have heard it said." This was Jesus' repeated response to the erroneous oral teachings of the Pharisees. We can use the same technique today as we examine the Talmud.[135]

The entire Gospel of Matthew is a book about conflict. This conflict centers on the religious leaders. John begins his ministry with conflict with the religious leaders. Jesus begins His ministry in Galilee with His Sermon on the Mount, which is an analysis of the religious leaders' teachings versus God's teachings. Jesus warns His disciples about "false prophets" in His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:15) and in His final discourse to His disciples about the religious leaders (Matthew 24:11, 24). Jesus sought to help the Jewish people to rediscover the Word of God in all its purity. The religious leaders in Jesus' day were not interested in rediscovering the Bible, but rather they were more interested in maintaining their traditions. Jesus, three times in the Gospel of Matthew, addresses the religious leaders and others as "false prophets." Yet today, when Christians try to rediscover "the truth of the Gospel," they, too, are often referred to as "false teachers." The Scriptures that Jesus cites against the religious leaders in His day are often cited very loosely against believers today who do not always concur with other believers over a so-called pattern for a public worship service.

In order to set the stage for the rediscovery of the Bible in the church today, hopefully, an analysis of the Pharisees and their oral Traditions will assist us in correctly handling these Scriptures about "false prophets" in our day-to-day walk with God. When Jesus appeared on the scene, He confronted over one hundred and fifty years of traditions from the Pharisees. Craig Blomberg, a distinguished Professor of the New Testament, says, "According to Josephus, the Pharisees emerged at least as early as the reign of John Hyrcanus, opposing the combination of kingly and priestly power in the Hasmonean rulers."[136] Walter Elwell and Robert Yarbrough point out that the name "'Pharisee' probably derives from an Aramaic word meaning 'separate'; hence, the Pharisees were 'the separate ones.'"[137] Since the synagogues were under their control and leadership, Joe Blair calls attention to the strong influence that the Pharisees had among the Israelites.[138] It is this control that John the Baptist and Jesus encountered in the beginning of their ministries. There are three basic sources that we rely

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[135]Gary North, *The Judeo-Christian Tradition: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), 73.

[136]Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 47. For an excellent overview of this time period, see Raymond P. Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People: From Legendary Times to Modern Statehood* (New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1998), 25-49.

[137]Walter A. Elwell and Robert W. Yarbrough, *Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 56. Elwell and Yarbrough add some additional information to the history of the Pharisees: "They came into being sometime before the New Testament era. According to Josephus they gained prominence during the reigns of John Hyrcanus I (135/4—104 B.C.) and Alexandra (76-67 B.C.)," Ibid. The date of the Pharisees predates even the reign of Hyrcanus. Josephus mentions the Pharisees' activities during the time of Jonathan (B. C. 161-143; *Antiquities of the Jews*, Bk. 13, Ch. 5, Sect. 7, Par. 161 and Sect. 9, Par. 171, in Whiston, 345, 346. For an excellent history of the Pharisees, see E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice & Belief, 66 BCE—66 CE* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992), 380-451.

[138]Joe Blair, *Introducing the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 42.

upon for our information concerning the Pharisees: (1) Josephus, (2) the New Testament, and (3) rabbinic documents.

JOSEPHUS

The writings of Josephus (AD 37-100) help to shed light on Jesus' encounter with the religious leaders with their oral traditions. These oral traditions were later codified about AD 200.[139] The Pharisees built up a body of tradition that was as binding as the written Torah. Josephus in his *Antiquities of the Jews*, written about AD 94, wrote of the traditions of the Pharisees:

> What I would now explain is this, that the Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the law of Moses; and for that reason it is that the Sadducees reject them and say that we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory which are in the written word, but are not to observe what are derived from the tradition of our forefathers.[140]

The oral law was for the Pharisee equal to the written Law. As Frederick Murphy has written, "The Pharisees built up a substantial body of tradition that was as binding for them as written Torah. This tradition probably corresponds to the later rabbinic idea of oral Torah. For the rabbis oral Torah was an integral part of the Torah given to Moses on Sinai, but it was passed on orally through the generations."[141] The stress upon the Oral Torah by the Pharisees is what caused the Pharisees to confront Jesus about His disciples breaking the "tradition of the elders." Matthew preserves this encounter:

> Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!" Jesus replied, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,' he is not to 'honor his father' with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.'" (Matthew 15:1-9)

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[139]See Rabbi Roy A. Rosenberg, *The Concise Guide to Judaism: History, Practice, Faith* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 67, where he says,

> The early tradition of the Pharisees had held that, while the written Torah was meant to be transmitted in written form, the oral Torah was not to be put in writing. The teachings of the sages were to be memorized, rather, and transmitted by word of mouth from scholar to scholar. It did not take long, of course, for the number of interpretations and decisions that constituted the oral Torah to become so vast that even the most brilliant scholars would have trouble recalling all of them (they also had to remember the names of the various sages who had originated or transmitted a decision). For this reason the head of the academy in the early years of the third century, Rabbi Judah the Nasi ("prince," or "patriarch"), resolved to reduce the oral Torah to writing. . . . Then about 220 A. D., he introduced the first authoritative summary of the rabbinic tradition to that date. This was the *Mishna* ("repetition"). The Mishna, based upon the laws of the Hebrew Bible, is the source of all subsequent Jewish law to the present day and is an object of study in the academies of all the forms of Judaism.

[140]See William Whiston, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, Bk. XIII, Ch. X, Sect. 6, Par. 297, in *The Works of Josephus*, New Updated Edition (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1987), 355.

[141]Frederick J. Murphy, *The Religious World of Jesus: An Introduction to Second Temple Palestinian Judaism* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), 223.

In the time of Christ, the Pharisees numbered about six thousand.[142] Josephus wrote about an incident that occurred during the time of Herod the Great (37 BC to AD 4), which states the approximate number of Pharisees during this time.

> (41) For there was a certain sect of men that were Jews, who valued themselves highly upon the exact skill they had in the law of their fathers, and made men believe they were highly favored by God, by whom this set of women were inveigled. These are those that are called the sect of the Pharisees, who were in a capacity of greatly opposing kings. A cunning sect they were, and soon elevated to a pitch of open fighting and doing mischief. (42) Accordingly, when all the people of the Jews gave assurance of their good will to Caesar, and to the king's government, these very men did not swear, being above six thousand; and when the king imposed a fine upon them, Pheroras's wife paid their fine for them.[143]

Before approaching the second source (New Testament) of our knowledge about the Pharisees, a comment by Scheindlin graphically captures the role that the Pharisees played during the reigns of John Hyrcanus (134-104 BC), Atistobulus I (104-103 BC), Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 BC), and Salome Alexandra (76-67 BC).

> Another group that was sometimes in opposition to the Hasmoneans was the Pharisees. They seem originally to have been non-priests who were eager to observe a strict rule of ritual purity and religious probity, and who therefore sometimes came into conflict with the authorities. Their leadership did not claim a cultic function, like the priests, but rather expertise in religious law and lore based on a body of religious traditions supplementary to the Torah, which they called 'the oral Torah. They laid stress on the obligation of each individual to observe religious practices of ever-increasing complexity and detail, rather than simply relying on the priesthood to accomplish the nation's religious duties vicariously by offering sacrifices on their behalf. By the first century C.E., their number included some priests and aristocrats as well.[144]

NEW TESTAMENT

This background of the Pharisees from Josephus sets the stage for a proper understanding of the role that the Pharisees played in their plot to ultimately destroy Jesus who posed a threat to their authority. To grasp Pharisaic history, we must not study Phariseeism in isolation from its historical roots and the strong political power this group yielded during the time of John Hyrcanus, the ministry of Jesus, and the academy established in Jamnia following the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. Jesus questioned their authority and this act got Him into trouble with the religious leaders.

As stated above the religion of the Pharisees is the religion of "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago" (Matthew 5:21). Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, dealt with the oral Torah of the Pharisees. This now-famous Sermon set the stage for the controversies that followed Jesus throughout His ministry. William David Davies (1911-2001), a pivotal figure in the fields of New Testament and Christian origins, aptly stresses the meaning of "You have heard" in his analysis of three passages in Matthew (12:1-14; 15:1-20; 19:1-

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[142]See N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 377, where he writes an interesting comment about the six thousand Pharisees:

> We do not know for sure how many Pharisees there were in the time of Jesus. The figure of six thousand, often quoted in this context from Josephus *Antiquities* 17.42, refers specifically to the Pharisees who refused to take the oath of allegiance to Caesar, sometime in the reign of Herod the Great. In the forty years or so between that incident and the time of Jesus several important political events had taken place, which might well have induced many more to join the movement. We may assume that there were in any case plenty of Pharisees who were not involved with the particular incident in question, and more again who were generally sympathetic to the movement.

[143]Josephus, *Antiquity of the Jews*, Bk. 17, Ch. 2, Sect. 4, Par. 41-42, in *Josephus*, 453. I am indebted to Frederick J. Murphy for this citation.

[144]Scheindlin, *Jewish People*, 40. His statement about "ever-increasing complexity" reminds one of Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees: "They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them" (Matthew 23:4).

19).[145] In the first citation (12:1-14), Jesus discusses the Pharisees' oral traditions about the Sabbath; in the second reference (15:1-20), Jesus again addresses the oral Torah of the Pharisees concerning the laws of purity; and in the third quotation (19:1-19), He addresses their traditions concerning divorce.

Jesus, in the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, warned His disciples about false prophets (7:15). Prior to this admonition, Jesus went right to the heart of oral traditions. This analysis and condemnation of the oral Torah of the Pharisees by Jesus is conceded by many modern day scholars. Davies, one such scholar, assesses the true intent of the Sermon on the Mount when he writes, "the SM itself is not set forth as a 'new', revolutionary Law, in sharp antithesis to that given on Sinai."[146] Again, Davies points out, with justice, that the "You have heard" but "I tell you" is Jesus' ethical demands set over against those of Judaism.[147] Gary Kilgore North (b. 1942), president of the institute of Christian Economics, also states the matter firmly: "The approach I have chosen here is to adopt Jesus' use of the technique, 'You have heard it said.' What He was attacking in each case was either a false tradition of the Pharisees or a false interpretation they imposed on an Old Testament text."[148]

Ed Glasscock does not overstate the case when he says, "Jesus was about to attack the oral interpretation of the law, which most Jews of the time had been conditioned to accept as the Law itself. Six times in the next few verses he will challenge their oral traditions."[149] Donald Alfred Hagner (b. 1936), ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church U.S.A.,[150] also notes that "By means of six bold antitheses representing the teaching of Jesus, Matthew now contrasts Jesus' exposition of the true and ultimate meaning of the Torah with the more common, rabbinic understandings of the commandments."[151]

The oral Torah was not codified until about AD 200.[152] Gary North illustrates through citations from the Mishnah and the Gemarah,[153] which is the codification of the oral Torah,[154] that there are contradictions

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[145]W. D. Davies, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 30.

[146]Ibid., 31.

[147]Ibid., 87.

[148]North, *Tradition*, 86. See also Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, expanded edition with replies to critics (New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co, 1984), where he says, "These radical commands (vv. 21-48) do not supercede the Older Testamental law; they illustrate and explain it. . . . The law demanded inner sanctification and its outward expression; the scribes and Pharisees disregarded the former and perverted the latter."

[149]Ed Glasscock, *Moody Gospel Matthew Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), 116.

[150] The following is a list of his accomplishments:

1964-66 Instructor in Greek, Fuller Theological Seminary
1969-70 Special Instructor in Bible, Wheaton College (Ill.)
1970-73 Assistant Professor of Biblical Studies, Wheaton College
1974-76 Associate Professor of Biblical Studies, Wheaton College
1970-76 Adjunct Professor, Wheaton College Graduate School
1970-71 Visiting Professor of New Testament, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School
1976-85 Associate Professor of New Testament, Fuller Theological Seminary
1978-93 Dean of the Young Life Summer Institute
1985-93 Professor of New Testament, Fuller Theological Seminary
1993- George Eldon Ladd Professor of New Testament, Fuller Theological Seminary

[151]Donald A. Hagner, Word Biblical Commentary, vol., 33a, *Matthew 1—13* (Dallas, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1993), 111.

[152]See Rosenberg, *Judaism*, 67; Murphy, *Jesus*, 235.

[153]This combination is called the Babylonian Talmud.

[154]North, *Tradition*, 84-105. See also Adin Steinsaltz, *The Essential Talmud*, translated from the Hebrew by Chaya Galai (USA: Basic Books, 1976), where he explains the Talmud:

> The formal definition of the Talmud is the summary of oral law that evolved after centuries of scholarly effort by sages who lived in Palestine and Babylonia until the beginning of the Middle Ages. It has two main components: the Mishnah, a book of *halakhah* (law) written in Hebrew; and the commentary on the Mishnah, known as the Talmud (or Gemarah), in the limited sense of the word, a summary of discussion and elucidation of the Mishnah written in Aramaic-Hebrew jargon.

between the written Torah and the oral Torah. C. M. Pilkington comments on the origin of the oral Torah: "The collection we now have in the Mishnah was edited by Rabbi Judah the Prince (*Ha-Nasi*), who lived from 135 to 217 CE [common era]. . . . 'Oral' is indeed an apt description of the Torah which followed the written Torah because it was essentially a record of oral discussion in courtrooms and academies."[155]

The Pharisees were in revolt against God's written Law; that is, the oral law was on par with the written Law. The Jewish leaders carried out this rebellion in the name of God's Law. This melting together of the two laws caused Jesus to issue a scathing rebuke against the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees. Matthew succinctly captures one such confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees:

> Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are. Woe to you, blind guides! You say, "If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath." You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? You also say, "If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath." You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. (Matthew 23:15-27)

Jesus not only concludes His ministry with a scathing rebuke of the religious leaders, but He also began His ministry with a brief analysis of their rejection of the written Torah for their oral Torah. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus discusses the "You have heard" (oral Torah) with "but I say unto you" (written Torah). For an extra Biblical source (oral) of this kind of unbiblical reasoning can be found among Israel's religious leaders. For instance, Rabbi Eleazar issued a statement—following the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70—upon the meaning of "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh." His commentary is a classic example of "You have heard." The Babylonian Talmud gives the following comment about Eleazar's commentary: "R. Eleazar further stated: What is meant by the Scriptural text, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh? This teaches that Adam had intercourse with every beast and animal but found no satisfaction until he cohabited with Eve."[156] If Matthew had recorded this saying, we could also find Jesus' "but I say unto you": "Anyone who has sexual relations with an animal must be put to death" (Exodus 22:19).

The Pharisees with their oral Torah exercised tremendous political power before, during, and after the ministry of Christ. It is in this regard to political power that Rosenberg draws attention to the domination that the Pharisees had even over the Sadducees:

> Since the Sadducees were for the most part Temple priests and wealthy aristocrats, their influence over the people as a whole was rather limited, and during much of their existence they had to abide by the rulings and interpretations of the

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This explanation, however, though formally correct, is misleading and imprecise. The Talmud is the repository of thousands of years of Jewish wisdom, and the oral law, which is as ancient and significant as the written law (the Torah), finds expression therein.

[155]C. M. Pilkington, *Judaism* (US: NTC Publishing Group, 1995), 37. For a copy of the Mishnah, see Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

[156]See Babylonian Talmud, *Yebamoth 63a*, in *The Soncino Talmud* [CD-ROM]. Available from Davaka's Judaic Software, item no., Win CD #1W691B, call 1-800-621-8227 for this CD, cost $299.00, [accessed 3 November 2008]. I am indebted to North for this citation; see North, *Tradition*, 86-87. Also see North for many examples as illustrated above in his book, *Ibid. 84-105.*

Pharisees (This extended even to the procedures of the Temple sacrifices, although the chief priests were themselves Sadducees.) With the destruction of the Temple the Sadducees ceased to exist as a sect.[157]

Their power extended even to the control of the synagogues. This control also existed even in the time of Jesus. Even when many of the leaders of Israel believed on Jesus, still they would not confess Him for fear of being thrown out of the synagogues by the Pharisees. John, an apostle of Jesus, writes about the tremendous influence exercised by the Pharisees:

> Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God. (John 12:42-43)[158]

Paul, a Pharisee, sets an example of the hatred of the Pharisees against Christians. In the Philippian letter, he describes his ancestry and earlier behavior toward the church: "If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless" (Philippians 3:4-6).[159] Luke calls attention, in his book to Theophilus, to the hatred exercised by some Pharisees against the followers of Jesus. One such person that Luke identifies is Paul. Luke lets his readers know that prior to Paul's conversion that he gave his approval to the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1). Opposition to Stephen arose as a result of members from the "Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia" (6:9).

After the conversion of Paul, he, too, had to warn against the circumcision group (Titus 1:11). Paul tells Titus:

> They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach—and that for the sake of dishonest gain. [12] Even one of their own prophets has said, "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons." [13] This testimony is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith [14] and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the commands of those who reject the truth. [15] To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. [16] They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good. (Titus 1:11-16)

The Pharisees were a part of this circumcision group. When some men from Judea went to Antioch, they created problems by insisting that unless one was circumcised according to the Law of Moses, then one could not be saved (Acts 15:1). As a result of this controversy, a council met at Jerusalem (15:4). During the meeting of the church, which included the apostles and elders, Luke reports: "some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, 'The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses'" (15:5). The influence of the Pharisees remained a viable force throughout the ministry of Paul. The Pharisees were so strong that they managed to survive the destruction of Jerusalem and establish a school in Jamnia (in Galilee).

POST-AD 70 AND THE PHARISEES

Following the Jewish War, the center of Jewish life moved to Jabneh (in Greek, Jamnia) under the leadership of Johanan ben Zakkai. The priesthood, the sacrifices, and the temple worship ceased as a result of the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.[160] After AD 70, the terms "Pharisee" and "scribe" drop out of common

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[157] Rosenberg, *Judaism*, 61.

[158] See E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice & Belief 63 BCE—66 CE*, (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992), 388-412, for a detailed study of the influence and control the Pharisees had in the first century.

[159] See also Galatians 1:13f.; 1 Corinthians 15:9; Acts 8:3; 9:1, 21; 22:4, 19; 26:10f.; 1 Thessalonians 2:14f.; Galatians 4:29; 6:12.

[160] Lavinia and Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *A Popular Dictionary of Judaism* (Illinois: NTC Publishing Group, 1997), 87.

usage and is replaced with "rabbi." The Jewish leaders who survived the fall of Jerusalem gathered at Jamnia, in western Judea, and began studying the Torah.[161]

Johanan ben Zakkai, who opposed the war, managed to escape the city by letting it be understood that he was dead. The Romans allowed those in the city to carry out their dead in coffins and bury them outside the city. Once he was on the outside, he went to Vespasian who granted him the right to establish a school in Jamnia.[162] The religious leadership passed from the priesthood to the rabbis. Scheindlin calls attention to the important role that Johanan ben Zakkai played in establishing rabbinic Judaism following the destruction of Jerusalem. He writes,

> What had to be guaranteed was the religious tradition embodied in the Torah and in the ever-proliferating body of religious laws. Johanan ben Zakkai and his colleagues thus took an important step in reorganizing Judaism into rabbinic Judaism, the form of the religion most widespread until the present. Rabbinic Judaism centers on the constant study of the torah and the oral traditions associated with it and involves the meticulous observance of religious regulations, which are understood as constituting a legal system. By placing the study of the Torah at the center of Jewish religious life, the rabbis incidentally laid the foundation for the preoccupation of later Jewish culture with intellectual activities of all kinds.[163]

Thus concludes Lavinia and Cohn-Sherbok that "It was the pharisaic interpretation of the Law that survived and was continued in the work of the rabbis."[164] The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 did not destroy the political clout of the Pharisees. Even before the destruction of the Temple, the interpretive tradition was well developed. Rabbi Rosenberg says,

> Because this interpretive tradition was well developed by the time of the Temple's destruction in the great revolt, Judaism was able to survive. Since the largest portion of the people looked to the Pharisaic sages for guidance, the end of the sacrificial system in the Jerusalem temple could be accepted, for the Pharisees mandated other forms of religious expression that could take its place.[165]

Sanders' writings also collaborates the findings of Rosenberg: "The Hasidim (at the time of the Hasmonean revolt) were Pharisees, and the post-70 rabbis were Pharisees; throughout the whole period 175 BC to AD 135 the populace basically followed the Pharisees."[166] This history of the Pharisees before and after the destruction of Jerusalem helps us to understand more clearly the ones to whom the term "false prophets" refer in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) in His castigation of the religious leaders in Israel (Matthew 23) and in His Eschatological Discourse (Matthew 24).

JAMNIA

Some scholars espouse a date of AD 85-100 for the writing of the Gospel of Matthew.[167] This date is given in conjunction with the events that transpired in Jamnia ca. AD 90. This notion of a late date is advanced in order to maintain that Matthew's purpose in writing was to combat rabbinic Judaism in Jamnia. But D. A. Carson approaches the purpose and early date with caution: "It is unwise to specify too precise an occasion and purpose, because the possibility of error and distortion increases as one leaves hard evidence behind for

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[161]Albert A. Bell, *Exploring the New Testament World: An Illustrated Guide to the World of Jesus and the First Christians*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 37.

[162]Scheindlin, *Jewish People*, 52. See also Lavinia, "Johanan ben Zakkai," in *Judaism*, 88.

[163]Scheindlin, *Jewish People*, 53.

[164]Lavinia, "Pharisee," in *Judaism*, 134.

[165]Rosenberg, *Judaism*, 66.

[166]Sanders, *Judaism*, 400.

[167]See David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 48-55. See also Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol., 33a (Texas: Word Book, 1993), lxxiii—lxxv, for caution on both sides of the issue of dating. See also D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 75-81, for a conservative view on the provenance, date, and destination of the Gospel of Matthew.

supposition."[168] It appears, so it seems to me, that Matthew's Gospel is dealing with the establishment of the identity of Jesus, but in this identity, Matthew records many of the encounters between Jesus and the religious leaders. Matthew's Gospel sets forth the uneasy feelings between Jesus and the religious leaders. The Gospel is not so much anti-Jewish as it is anti-Jewish leaders in their conflict with Jesus the Messiah.[169]

Murphy asserts that Matthew rewrote the traditions to make the Pharisees look worse.[170] We cannot but be respectful to the suggestion, but difficulties remain with his presuppositions. He correctly assesses the events that surrounded Jamnia when he writes about the Pharisees and Jamnia, but when he asserts that this Gospel was written to combat rabbinic Judaism in Jamnia, he cites no concrete evidence to substantiate his allegations:

> After the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE, a group of Pharisees, scribes, and others gathered at Jamnia to restructure Jewish society in the absence of the Temple and its establishment. They confirmed the Torah as the center of the life of the Jewish people, and made Pharisaic interpretation normative for all. Torah teachers were now called rabbis. The budding Christian movement now faced not a multiplicity of groups, but a rabbinic Judaism that claimed that it alone was normative. This caused the Christians to define themselves over against rabbinic Judaism. Many have seen the activity at Jamnia as the background against which to read the Gospel of Matthew.[171]

As noted above from the writings of Josephus and the New Testament, it goes almost without saying that Phariseeism dominated pre-70 Judaism as well as post-70 rabbinic Judaism. There are substantial continuities between them concerning an emphasis on non-biblical or oral traditions.[172] The Gospel of Matthew is a book of conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders during His ministry. Jamnia does confirm the entrenchment that the Pharisees had during Jesus' ministry. They never lost their zeal for the traditions of the elders—before and after the destruction of Jerusalem. Sanders also calls attention to the name change of the Pharisees following the destruction of the Jerusalem: "After the destruction of Jerusalem, they led the reconstruction of Judaism, giving up their party name, becoming more catholic, and taking the title 'rabbis', 'teachers'."[173]

This treatise on tradition has only skimmed the surface in the area for a proper methodology of rediscovering the Bible. The religious leaders in Jesus' day, especially the Pharisees, were so politically strong that even with the destruction of Jerusalem, they were able to regroup in Jamnia and solidify their oral traditions in written form—the Babylonian Talmud. These were the traditions that Jesus addressed in His Sermon on the Mount. These were the traditions that Jesus had to confront over and over in His ministry to the nation of Israel. Is it any wonder that He cautioned His disciples about the "leaven of the Pharisees"? Just as Josiah rediscovered the Bible for himself and the nation of Judah, so today Christians need to rediscover the Bible as it discloses God's scheme of redemption in and through Jesus Christ. Justo L. Gonzalez (b. 1937), retired Latino Methodist historian and theologian, and Catherine G. Gonzalez, ordained Presbyterian minister and Professor of Church History at Columbia Theological Seminary, correctly state: "We must learn to reevaluate and reinterpret what has been handed down to us."[174] Once more, their analysis of restoring the Bible to its right place is full of insight: "They were so used to reading the Bible as they had been taught by generations of interpreters that any questioning of that interpretation seemed to be a questioning of Scripture itself."[175]

The next chapter (Chapter 5) draws attention to the need to reread many texts of Scripture through "new eyes." This chapter (5) examines the principles of biblical situation ethics in light of numerous examples from the Old Testament books in order to draw upon principles to make judgments concerning issues that Christians

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[168]D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in Frank E. Gaebelein, vol., 8, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 22.

[169]Carson, "Matthew," in *Bible Commentary*, 20.

[170]Murphy, *Jesus*, 232.

[171]Ibid., 234.

[172]Sanders, *Judaism*, 413.

[173]Ibid., 412.

[174]Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching: the Pulpit and the Oppressed* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980), 31.

[175]Ibid., 30.

are divided over today. The title of this chapter is “Graded Absolutism.” In a nut-shell, graded absolutism simply states that when two laws come into conflict, one law may give way to another law.

There are circumstances in which “mercy” takes precedence, often times, over law. Graded absolutism holds that there are more absolutes than one. It is the pyramid of values in accordance with God’s own nature. Each particular command of God is absolute in its own sphere. There is a hierarchy of laws within God’s kingdom. In other words, some laws take precedence over other laws. There are times in which *mercy* takes the lead over law. When two laws appear to conflict with one another, the higher law, so it appears, take supremacy over the lower law. What does graded absolutism mean? These are questions that the next chapter seeks to deal with—old texts through new eyes.

5

Graded Absolutism

> The Church 'has' the Word, and yet it must always receive it anew, if it is actually to proclaim it. . . . So the Church built up a mighty apparatus, a system of ecclesiastical assurances, by means of which it might become the power in control of the divine revelation. The authority of the divine Word was seized (so to speak) and made available in an ecclesiastical system of authority. The Church of faith and the free-governing grace of God became the Church of the holy episcopal cannon law. The authority of the Word of God was delegated to this legal apparatus of the Church, and the crown of this system of assurances is the Papacy. When the Pope speaks, God speaks.[176]

When we reflect upon "situation ethics," we must distinguish between biblical situation ethics and humanist situation ethics. Is everything always "black" or "white"? Are there ever any gray areas? Is there such a thing as "graded absolutism"? In other words, do some laws take precedence over other laws? Is there ever a time in which *mercy* takes the lead over law? Can one be guilty of legalism in dealing with others? When two laws appear to conflict with one another, does the higher law take supremacy over the lower law? What does "graded absolutism" mean? These are questions that this chapter seeks to deal with.

To begin this study, it will be helpful to briefly observe two men of distinction who have addressed themselves to the subject of "situation ethics" without differentiating between biblical and humanist situation ethics. Dave Miller,[177] Executive Director of Apologetics Press, and Bert Thompson,[178] former director of Apologetics Press, a creationist organization, from the 1980s to 2005, wrote articles about Matthew 12:1-8 from which they drew certain conclusions about "situation ethics." Both men seek to preserve the Word of God as applicable to every area of our lives—and everyone must seek this same obedience. In their analysis of Matthew 12 and "situation ethics," it appears, so it seems to me, that they are arguing against Joseph Fletcher's "situation ethics"[179] rather than biblical "situation ethics."

Everyone is a situational ethicist. Even Dave Miller and Bert Thompson cannot escape applying the principles of situational ethics to certain aspects of their own lives. All people make decisions upon the existential situation. The distinction between Fletcher's ethics and biblical ethics is as far apart as the East is from the West. In our day, the phrase "situation ethics" does not communicate adequately the truths binding upon God's children. Since "situation ethics" convey negative overtones, perhaps another term may express more fittingly the truths contained in the Scriptures, namely, "graded absolutism."[180] This expression conveys more accurately the teachings of God for our society and culture. How we phrase certain truths or untruths

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[176]Emil Brunner, *The Divine-Human Encounter* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1943), 25.

[177]See Dave Miller, "Matthew 12 and Situation Ethics," *Firm Foundation* 105 (December, 1988): 1, 6.

[178]See Bert Thompson, "Did Jesus Teach Situation Ethics?," *The Spiritual Sword* 45, no. 3 (April 1991): 3-6. Thompson is no longer director of Apologetics Press.

[179]See Joseph Fletcher: *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966). For an excellent analysis of Flethcher's' Situation Ethics, see Joseph Fletcher (1905-1991), American professor who founded the theory of situational ethics in the 1960s, and John Warwick Montgomery (b. 1931), Emeritus Professor of Law and Humanities, University of Bedfordshire, England, *Situation Ethics* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Dimension Books, 1972). This book is a transcript of a public dialogue between Professor Joseph Fletcher and Dr. John Warwick Montgomery. See John Warwick Montgomery's website: www.jwm.christendom.co.uk for background information on Montgomery.

[180]Graded absolutism holds that there are more absolutes than one. It is the pyramid of values in accordance with God's own nature. Each particular command of God is absolute in its own sphere. There is a hierarchy of laws within God's kingdom.

often hinges upon clichés employed to convey the truth or untruth intended. In other words, word groups can be very deceptive.

PHRASEOLOGY

In analyzing "situation ethics," it is necessary that we consider the appropriateness of certain expressions to express adequately the concept of biblical situation ethics. Since slogans, or phrases, are a part of our culture, we may attach good or sinister motives. Expressions may be good or bad depending upon the situation. Sayings communicate or describe thoughts or events. Clichés may be utilized to cover some clandestine operation—that is, some heinous, abhorrent, abominable, atrocious, inhuman, monstrous crime.

Gay Individuals

To illustrate the above paragraph, one only needs to reflect upon certain terms that no longer convey the same type imagery that it did just a few years ago. Presently we do not dare speak of an individual as "gay." Originally the word had a good connotation (implied meaning). For instance, a few years ago, when we spoke of a person as "gay," we simply meant that person was radiant, animated, and lively. But now, when we refer to a person as "gay," we have reference to his or her sexual preference. The word "gay" now identifies individuals that are homosexual, bisexual, or effeminate.[181] Even though this word "gay" is still an excellent word, nevertheless, this word must be used with caution.

Freedom of Choice

Another slogan that has a good ring is "freedom of choice." There is nothing wrong in-and-of-itself concerning this idiom, but, on the other hand, the pro-abortionist advocates (those in favor of murdering the unborn) choose this cliché to advocate an individual's right to kill one's baby if she so desires. Freedom of choice, so it is maintained, is everyone's right, so defends the pro-abortionist.[182]

Illegal Use of Words in Hitler's Germany

To cite another example, John S. Powell demonstrates forcefully the illegal use of words to cover sinister operations in Hitler's Germany.[183] He exhibits the ideas of "newspeak" as presented in George Orwell's books *1984*[184] and *Animal Farm*.[185] Powell captures graphically the ideas of George Orwell's (1903-1950) depiction of the illegal use of phrases to cover-up one's terribly harmful motives. Powell tells of the "Killing Centers" that Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) organized to exterminate the undesirables.[186] The amazing thing about Hitler's clandestine operation was the euphemistic terms he adopted to camouflage the exterminating centers.

One such organization established for the extermination of the sick and disabled, he called the "Realm's Work Committee of Institutions for Cure and Care."[187] Another establishment, devoted exclusively to the killing of children, was known by the name of "Realm's Committee for Scientific Approach to Severe Illness

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[181]John Ayto, *Dictionary of Word Origins* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1990), 251, writes: "The 20th century sense 'homosexual,' which first came into general usage in the 1950s, seems to have arisen from an earlier American slang term *gay cat*, which originally denoted a young male tramp who was the companion of an older tramp. The implications of a homosexual relationship which this carried had led by the 1930s to the use of *gay cat* for any young male homosexual, and the application of *gay* to 'homosexual' was probably generalized from this."

[182]See Jean Staker Garton, *Who Broke the Baby?* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany Fellowship, 1979), 13-19 for an excellent treatment of "Seduction by Semantics."

[183]See John S. Powell, *Abortion: The Silent Holocaust* (Texas: Argus Communications, 1981).

[184] See George Orwell, *1984* (New York: Penguin Books, 1983).

[185]See George Orwell, *Animal Farm* (New York: New American Library, 1946).

[186]Powell, *Abortion: The Silent Holocaust*, 30-39.

[187]Ibid., 31.

Due to Heredity and Constitution."[188] A third group, who processed questionnaires for these organizations, was called the "Charitable Transport Company for the Sick."[189] Finally, another agency, which collected the cost of the killings from the families, was called the "Charitable Foundation for Institutional Care."[190]

The organizational names that Hitler gave to the "killing centers" were names that had a "good ring" to the concerned, but he misused the wording in the same way that Fletcher prostituted the expression "situation ethics." Since Joseph Fletcher (1905-1991), an American professor who founded the theory of situational ethics in the 1960s, has given an un-biblical connotation to this phrase,[191] then, we need to choose a term that will more adequately express the teachings of God whenever we confront a situation in which we must make a choice between two absolutes or between "mercy" or "law." When we make a choice between two absolutes, this alternative is known as "graded absolutism."[192]

The Scriptures provide many examples of "graded absolutism." Often the selection that we make between two moral duties depends on the situation. In other words, we are exempt from our duty to the "lower law" by virtue of our obedience to the "higher law." It is not that we do not believe in God's absolutes, but we believe that under certain conditions, some laws are "weightier"[193] than other laws (Matthew 23:23). Did not Jesus speak of the "least" and the "greatest"[194] commandments (Matthew 5: 19)?

SITUATION ETHICS

The above background concerning the improper utilization of expressions calls for further elaboration about the slogan "situation ethics." This designation in-and-of-itself is not bad terminology; but, like many other good sayings, it has received an ill-conceived connotation, that is to say, everything goes. In spite of its misuse, "Few positions are totally without any merit. There is usually enough truth in any false view to make it hold [some] water" writes Norman Geisler (b. 1932).[195] At the moment, "situational ethics" is a theory of knowledge that does not believe that there are any moral absolutes by which men and women are to be governed.[196] To state it more forcefully, the situationist believes that "man is the center of all things." That is to say, man is his own God; he himself decides what is right and what is wrong.[197] Man becomes his own God.[198] Every Christian must reject this atheistic philosophy—a philosophy that is totally destructive to any society.[199]

It is necessary for us to make a distinction between biblical situation ethics and humanistic situation ethics. In biblical situation ethics, we seek to make application to various circumstances founded upon biblical principles, not simply that the "end justifies the means." To accomplish biblical situation ethics, we must search

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[188]Ibid.

[189]Ibid., 32.

[190]Ibid.

[191]Fletcher, *Situation Ethics*, 120: "Only the end justifies the means; nothing else."

[192]Graded absolutism, unlike situation ethics, does not approve of wife-swapping, adultery to get out of prison, blasphemy, abortion of unwanted babies, harlotry to teach maturity, nor premarital intercourse.

[193]KJV

[194]KJV

[195]Norman Geisler, *Christian Ethics: Options and Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 34.

[196]Fletcher, *Situation Ethics*, 120-133.

[197]I highly recommend Ravi Zacharias, *Deliver Us from Evil: Restoring the Soul in a Disintegrating Culture* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1996), for an in-depth study of men and women acting as if they themselves are gods.

[198]For an excellent treatise on moral absolutes, see Ravi Zacharias, *The Real Face of Atheism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004). See also Zacharias, in his book *Can Man Live Without* God (Dallas: Word, 1994), 23, where he gives a classic example of a life without moral absolutes. He writes about his visit to Poland when he was taken to the Nazi death camps of Auschwitz and Birkenau and found on a wall the following inscription by Hitler that sets forth the grim results of a live lived without moral absolutes:

> I freed Germany from the stupid and degrading fallacies of conscience and morality. . . . We will train young people before whom the world will tremble. I want young people capable of violence—imperious, relentless and cruel.

[199]For a thorough investigation and analysis of this philosophy ("man is the center of all things"), I recommend Norman L. Geisler, *Is Man the Measure?: An Evaluation of Contemporary Humanism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983).

for terminology that will more adequately define or express God's standards. One such phrase is "graded absolutism." This designation expresses more accurately the idea of biblical situation ethics as expressed in the Bible. In other words, "graded absolutism" is simply the "person-in-the-situation" as taught in Holy Scripture.

GRADED ABSOLUTISM

In "graded absolutism," there are higher and lower moral laws.[200] In other words, not all moral laws are of equal weight. Jesus spoke, as mentioned above, of the "more important matters of the law"[201] (Matthew 23:23) and of the "least" (5:19) and of the "greatest"[202] (22:36). From these three citations of Scripture, we observe that moral laws are hierarchically graded, that is to say, there are various levels in moral laws. Since there are different levels in moral laws, there may be times in which moral conflicts are unavoidable. In other words, there are times in which we cannot obey both commands of God simultaneously.

We are commanded to submit to God and to civil authorities, but what happens when these two powers come into conflict? There are times in which we cannot conform to both at the same time. As we seek the proper resolution to our dilemmas, the solutions are not always the easiest thing to learn or to ascertain. Since our knowledge is imperfect, we must not be dogmatic in our decisions. Norman Geisler (1932-2019), Christian apologist and the co-founder of Southern Evangelical Seminary, correctly states the difficulty:

> An absolutist often overstates one's case, acting as though one has an absolute understanding of absolutes. Antinomians [those without law] make a contribution to ethics by stressing the relative dimension. Finite man does not have an infinite understanding of the infinite. Paul said, "now I know in part" (1 Cor. 13:12). The basic ethical principles are absolute, but our human perspective on them is less than absolute. In pointing to our changing understanding of God's unchanging moral law, antinomians have rendered an unwitting service to Christian ethics.[203]

God and Civil Government

To explain by example the concept of "graded absolutism," consider the following biblical problem of two absolutes in conflict: (1) our responsibility to obey government, and (2) our responsibility to obey God. Paul says, "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God" (Romans 13:1). This is the law of God. Everyone must submit to government. But are there no exemptions to this absolute?[204] An example of the "exemption" concept is the tax laws of the US government. Often the government will make an "exemption" from the tax laws because of particular situations, but the law still stands. The United States government made exemptions for filing tax returns for the service men while in Saudi, Arabia. Nevertheless, the tax law is still absolute in its intended meaning.

Christians are commanded by God to submit to governing authorities. This command from God is an absolute truth. What do we resolve to carry out if the governing authorities demand compliance with things that are contrary to loyalty to God's commandments? In seeking a solution to the above dilemma, we must turn to the Scriptures for clarification. The Bible addresses itself to the concept of two absolutes coming into conflict with one another. For example, the case of Peter and John are called forth to enhance the dilemma of two supreme laws coming into friction. Peter and John were summoned before the Sanhedrin, who then "commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus"; but they answered, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God" (Acts 4:18-19). They faced a dilemma. What should be done in such a difficulty? Should they obey God or man? They obeyed the higher law, namely, submission to God; thus, the apostles resolved the conflict. Geisler correctly states, "God is the one absolute

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[200]I am indebted for much of this discussion to Geisler, *Christian Ethics*, 113-132.

[201]The KJV renders this as: "weightier *matters* of the law."

[202]The KJV renders this as: "greatest commandment."

[203]Geisler, *Christian Ethics*, 35.

[204]In using "exemption" rather than "exception," one seeks to maintain the absoluteness of the law. See Geisler, *Christian Ethics*, 110 for an excellent examination of this distinction.

basis for all laws that reflect His nature, and each law is absolutely binding on the particular activity it governs."[205]

Truth Telling versus False Telling

Rahab the Harlot

To cite another case dealing with biblical situation ethics, one should reflect upon Rahab's "false telling" versus "truth telling," which stands as a classic. What should she have done? Should she have practiced deception to save the spies? What was right? What was wrong? What would you have done? Should we always tell the truth despite circumstances? Hasn't everyone been confronted with the dilemma of when to tell or when not to tell the truth? Are there ever any "exemptions" to the command not to tell falsehoods? Does God withhold accountability from the person who demonstrates mercy to the innocent rather than truth telling to the guilty? What does the Word of God assert concerning mercy to the innocent instead of "truth telling" to the guilty?

Before we seek an answer to Rahab's predicament, we should observe what God has said about fabrication. God, through Moses, commanded that one "shall not give false testimony against your neighbor" (Exodus 20:16). Paul also writes that we "must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor" (Ephesians 4:25). Again, Solomon says that "The LORD detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful" (Proverbs 12:22). Now, on the other hand, the Bible records circumstances in which lying was practiced in order to save lives. Were the above Scriptures violated in the actions of Rahab?

Can we deceive and still be innocent? Rahab is one such person who exhibited "mercy showing" rather than "truth telling" to the guilty. Rahab hid the spies, who were involved in espionage, from Israel's enemies and then lied to save their lives (Joshua 2:1-7). Did she sin? Did she apply in principle biblical law and truth to the situation? Was she mixed up in "situation ethics"? It seems that God withheld accountability and rewarded her for her "mercy showing" to the people of God rather than "truth telling" to God's enemies. She practiced what Jesus condemned the Pharisees for not considering—"I desire mercy, not sacrifice" (Matthew 12:7).

In spite of her deception, God immortalized her in the Book of Hebrew's "Hall of Fame" (Hebrews 11:31). Nowhere does the Bible condemn her for her actions. In fact she is listed in the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:5). Her performance was an integral part of mercy[206] with which God was pleased. God is a God of mercy.[207] In evaluating her difficulty, we must weigh the totality of God's Word. We should reflect upon the words of the prophet Micah in his admonition to the children of Israel: "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). Again, we should reflect upon the words of Jesus to the religious leaders: "If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent" (Matthew 12:7).

Since God desires mercy more than sacrifice, then, it should not be surprising to us that mercy takes the lead over law. This revelation of God's kindness should come as a relief to all. For one to comprehend the implications of "truth telling" versus "false telling" and the superiority of one absolute over another absolute, we only need to read the story of Corrie Ten Boom (1892-1983) who lied to the Nazis to save the lives of Jews.

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[205]Ibid., 95.

[206]See Jesus' illustrations concerning "mercy" taking precedence over "law," in Matthew 12:1-8. Even though Jesus did not address Rahab in His confrontation with the religious leaders, nevertheless, there is still the same principle of mercy taking precedence over law.

[207]Jonah's conversation with God is an excellent example of God's mercy:

> But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. [2] He prayed to the LORD, 'O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.' (Jonah 4:1-3)

Her deceptions were not evil, but good. Parallels are present between the ***then*** (Rahab) and the ***now*** (Corrie Ten Boom).

The Hebrew Midwives

Another first-class illustration of circumstances determining the direction one should follow is the Hebrew narrative about the Hebrew midwives' deception to Pharaoh. Moses chronicles this narrative in his second book of the Pentateuch:

> The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, "When you help the Hebrew women in childbirth and observe them on the delivery stool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live." The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, "Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?" The midwives answered Pharaoh, "Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive." So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. (Exodus 1:15-20)

This is another instance of God withholding accountability from individuals who demonstrate "mercy" to the innocent rather that "truth telling" to the guilty. As cited above, Jesus forcefully set forth this truth when He cites the Older Testament along with his comments: "If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent" (Matthew 12:7).

God's absolute about falsehood still stands—"Truth telling" and "mercy showing" are both grounded in God's nature. In God there are no conflicts between these two attributes—"mercy showing" and "truth telling." With men and women though, there are often conflicts between the two. The problem we face is that occasionally we cannot perform both simultaneously. But, on the other hand, God, in such cases, withholds accountability from the person who demonstrates "mercy" to the innocent rather than "truth telling" to the guilty. Geisler goes right to the heart of the matter in his observation concerning lying in preference to "truth telling" versus "mercy showing" when he writes:

> Some would prefer calling this not a "lie" but an "intentional falsification." Call it what we will, it does not change the fact that it would be morally wrong—unless, of course, one is obeying a higher moral law in so doing. I prefer calling it a "lie" so that it is clearly understood that lying as such (without a higher conflicting law) is wrong.[208]

The three examples presented above about (**1**) "God and Government," (**2**) "Rahab and the Spies," and the (**3**) "Hebrew Midwives" illustrate that some absolutes are higher than other absolutes. There are graded levels of moral commands in Scripture. Not all moral laws are of equal weight (Matthew 23:23[209]; 5:19[210]). We must never forget that there may be occasions in which mercy takes priority over law. We have a moral obligation to search the Scriptures in every conflicting situation. Every text must be set in conversation with the whole Bible. Leroy Garrett (1918-2015), professor and former editor and publisher of *Restoration Review*) captures the essence of the "greatest" versus the "least" in his essay, "What I Believe about Situation Ethics."

> Most, if not all, moral problems are solved in part by a reference to it all depends, i.e., it all depends on the situation. Is it right to deceive? Is it right to drive in excess of the speed limit? Is it right to break into your neighbor's house? . . . It is the person in the situation that makes the difference, which means that the view I am defending might better be called "Person-in-the-situation" ethics . . . There is in moral thought a concept known as the "principle of necessity," which says

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[208]Norman Geisler, *Options in Contemporary Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 91.

[209] "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former."

[210] "Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

that if it is necessary to act contrary to laws that one would ordinarily honor in order to help someone in an emergency situation, then "what is necessary" takes precedence over law.[211]

"What is necessary" often requires one law taking precedence over another law or, to state it another way, mercy often takes priority over another known absolute. Remember that laws are made for our well-being, not men and women for law. Again, we should recall Jesus' philosophy of "mercy" taking precedence over "law" in his confrontation with the religious leaders who practiced law over mercy. Mark adds additional information to this episode in which Jesus rebukes the leaders of Israel for their lack of mercy:

> One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. [24] The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" [25] He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? [26] In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions." [27] Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. [28] So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." (Mark 2:23-28)

What is the difference between the humanistic situation ethics of Joseph Fletcher and the biblical situation ethics of Christians? With Fletcher the circumstances determine what is right or wrong.[212] On the other hand, the Christian does not allow the situation to decide what is right or wrong, but, rather, he or she simply allows the situation to assist one in discovering which moral law applies in a difficulty. We must look at the facts and then determine which law of God should be obeyed—or mercy extended. We should not be guilty of: "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God" (Matthew 22:29).

Geisler is on target when he says, "graded absolutism holds that there are more absolutes than one."[213] He makes a distinction between the situation ethics of the Bible (graded absolutism) and the situation ethics (antinomianism—without law) of Fletcher.[214] Geisler says,

> Fletcher believes that the situation determines what one should do in a given case; graded absolutism holds that situational factors only help one to discover what God has determined that we should do. That is, the situation does not fill an empty absolute with content and thereby determine what one would do. Rather, the situational factors merely help one discover which command of God is applicable to that particular case. . . . It is true that occasionally the conclusions are the same, but they are based on very different reasons. Hence, the similarities are only accidental and not essential. Fletcher concludes something is right or wrong because the "existential particularities" of the situation determine it; graded absolutism, on the other hand, concludes something is right or wrong because God has declared it.[215]

MATTHEW 12: GRADED ABSOLUTISM

Jesus sets biblical situational ethics, or graded absolutism, forth in His encounter with the Pharisees.

> At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. [2] When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath." [3] He answered, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? [4] He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. [5] Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? [6] I tell you that one[a] greater than the temple is here. [7] If you had known what these words mean, 'I

[211]Leroy Garrett, "What I Believe About Situation Ethics," *Restoration Review*, vol. 12, no. 10 (December 1988), 150-51.

[212]Fletcher, *Situation Ethics*, 134-45.

[213]Geisler, *Options in Contemporary Christian Ethics*, 93.

[214]Geisler prefers the expression "graded absolutism" to "situation ethics" because of its current usage—everything goes. The expression "situation ethics" today represents a philosophy that is anti-God. In other words, a belief that there are no absolutes, everything is relative. For example, there is no such thing as right and wrong, that is to say, good or evil.

[215]Geisler, *Options in Contemporary Christian Ethics*, 93.

[a] Or *something*; also in verses 41 and 42

desire mercy, not sacrifice,'[b] you would not have condemned the innocent. [8] For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." (Matthew 12:1-8)

Since Matthew 12 is called forth as testimony to represent biblical "situation ethics," or "graded absolutism," then, it is essential that we carefully analyze this pericope (section). Does this segment of Scripture teach "graded absolutism"? In seeking an answer, we must not confuse the teachings of Fletcher with the teachings of Christ. "Situation ethics" based upon the philosophy of Fletcher must be rejected—it is anti-God. But if our idea of ethics is not humanistic in origin but biblical in origin, then, there is no reason to deny the plain teachings of the Scriptures. Some Christians think such a position changes God's Law for the sake of convenience.

Dave Miller, as cited above, complains about the position many Christians take concerning biblical situation ethics. He apparently does not consider an alternative phrase to express the truths of God more accurately for our culture. Miller asserts:

> A favorite "proof test" of the situation ethicist and, increasingly, of the libertine within the church, is the incident recorded in Matthew 12:1-9. . . . Some have suggested this passage teaches that times arise within the Christian's life when he must break the "letter of the law" to keep the "spirit of the law." They maintain that Jesus permits us to violate His will at times for the sake of convenience. If compliance with His words becomes inconvenient, then those words may be treated as optional. . . . For them, right and wrong, truth and error are obscure, blurred, hazy, gray, and complex. What is wrong in one situation may be right and acceptable in another. [216]

It is obvious that Miller overstates his case; he also accuses, without evidence, other believers of manipulation of the Law of God to justify one's own selfish ends. In other words, Miller charges other Christians with blatant disregard for God's Word by saying, "If I do not like what God said, then, I will violate the law to accomplish my desired ends so that I am obeying the 'spirit of the law.'" Is this the philosophy of believers? I think not! We do not, and must not, advocate the breaking of God's Law "for the sake of convenience." He makes this assertion, without facts to substantiate his allegations, against other believers who rely upon Jesus' teachings in Matthew 12 to draw conclusions that differ with his. These Christians are not guilty of saying, as Miller does, "right and wrong, truth and error are obscure, blurred, hazy, gray, and complex." He exaggerates his concern.

THE HERMENEUTICAL APPROACH FROM *THEN* TO *NOW*

An interpreter is often confronted with the hermeneutical question of how to relate the circumstances in life to the situational ethics in the Bible—from ***then*** to ***now***. It is obvious that every interpreter must make the hermeneutical jump from the ***then*** of the Scriptures to the ***now*** of the present. This jump must be made on the analogy of Scripture, that is to say, by the principles set forth by the Holy Spirit, not man's ingenuity to violate Scripture as did the Pharisees (Matthew 15:1-13). This in-built process of clarification and correction of our interpretation is accomplished through apparent analogies and similarities. As we read the Book of Matthew, we discover broad principles set forth to assist us in our interpretation of difficult situations.

An exploration of Matthew's description of Christ's confrontation with the religious leaders is most helpful in seeking biblical answers to friction (see Matthew 12:1-8). For us to be "biblical" in applying the principles set forth by Jesus do not mean that we have to create the same conflicts in order to give the same answers. To illustrate the above principle of "situational ethics," five additional subjects will be explored to demonstrate the principles set forth by Jesus in Matthew 12:

- monetary assistance to unbelievers

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[b] Hosea 6:6

[216] Miller, "Matthew 12 and Situation Ethics," 6.

- assistance to someone in need on Sunday
- divorce for other causes than adultery
- observance of the Passover at a different time frame than authorized by God
- two brothers who violated God's Law, but not condemned.

Monetary Assistance to Unbelievers

Paul encouraged the Galatians to "do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Galatians 6:10). This is a case for "situation ethics." If we can help only one family or individual—one family belongs to God and the other does not—what criteria must be exercised in determining our judgment? This decision presents a predicament for us. We must choose one or the other. How do we resolve the problem? In this case, the situation resolves the outcome. We make judgments upon the circumstances—everyone is a situational ethicist, whether we like it or not! This illustration may be somewhat overly simplified. To illustrate, let everyone think about some uncertainties that are more convoluted in nature. The next issue is a little more intricate in nature, but not extremely so. Nevertheless, assistance to someone in need on Sunday may take precedence over the instructions not to forsake the assembly (Hebrews 10:25, KJV).

Sunday Morning Assembly

If one is on his or her way to the assembly on Sunday morning to meet with the saints and comes across a very bad automobile accident, what action should be taken by the believer who applies Hebrews 10:25 to the Sunday morning assembly? Should he or she continue the journey to the Sunday morning assembly or should one give assistance rather than continue on the journey so that one does not violate the command to meet?[217] If one chooses to place a human being above the Sunday service because of the circumstances, then, this conduct is grounded on situational ethics. In this scenario, the qualifying factors regulate one's actions—forsake the assembly or render help. Is this biblical? Is this action based upon situational ethics? To return to the story of David (1 Samuel 21:1-6; Matthew 12:1-8), we recall that David's situation resulted in extreme hunger for himself and his men; but his hunger and need took priority over sacred ritual. David's incidence is the ***then*** and the automobile accident is the ***now.***

Divorce for Other Causes than Adultery

Should we ever apply the righteousness of mercy to an individual caught in a marriage that is "hell on earth"? Should one have to stay in a marriage in which the husband physically abuses the wife and children? Can we draw principles from the story of David in Matthew 12 to the subject of divorce for other reasons than sexual immorality? It appears, so it seems, that a close scrutiny of some marriages demand that the standard of "mercy" takes precedence over "law." Is it possible that the state of affairs is the determining factor in deciding whether or not one can divorce for other reasons than sexual immorality?

The question of divorce is a puzzling uncertainty to many Christians. Even though divorce is a very perplexing predicament, we still need to come out of the closet and deal with the problems that people face daily—the ***now***. There are no "pat answers" to all of the problems that we face in everyday life that are beyond our control. We should be realistic in our approach to divorce. The "nuts and bolts" of life must be dealt with. The topic of divorce and remarriage is much more complex than we wish to admit. There are no "pat answers." Since sin is a part of the society, we must seek answers for solutions to the divorce dilemma from principles set forth in Holy Scripture.

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[217]I am granting the traditional interpretation of Hebrews 10:25 that teaches one cannot miss an assembly on Sunday morning. Although this Scripture is relied upon by many Christians to teach that one must not skip a Sunday morning service, still it must be brought to the attention of the reader that this verse does not teach that interpretation. This Scripture teaches that one must not abandon, give up, or toss aside. This Scripture, too, is an old text that needs to be reexamined through new eyes.

Can we conceive of any circumstance in which divorce would be acceptable to God without sexual immorality on the part of one of the partners? Do we say NO? Did Jesus intend to teach that there are no grounds for divorce other than fornication or adultery? When Matthew, Mark, and Luke recorded the divorce sayings of Jesus, did they have in view that His words were a dissertation on the subject of divorce and remarriage? What about wife abuse, husband abuse, child abuse, desertion, murder, armed robbery, and so on? Are these justifiable reasons for divorce? These are issues that need to be answered! Perhaps, a biblical concept of situational ethics or graded absolutism will help to determine the proper course of action. Is there any justification for applying the principle of "mercy" over "law" as set forth by Jesus in His confrontation with the religious leaders (Matthew 12:1-8)?

It is easy for us to answer emphatically—"no other cause than fornication." For many Christians, if one is the victim of ill-treatment or extreme brutality that is still not a sufficient biblical cause for divorce. In seeking answers to many complex issues, we must rely upon God's Revelation in its totality, not just proof-texting. We must rely upon God's Word, the standard by which all things must be judged, in judging the principles of right and wrong. When we limit divorce only to sexual immorality, we create impossible situations for the innocent victim.[218]

To set the stage for the principle of "mercy" over "law," I present two stories about murder and wife abuse. These two stories illustrate the "person-in-the-situation" in order to focus upon the words of Jesus in Matthew 12. These two accounts are about the trauma two women experienced with their husbands who were involved in some "unclean thing."[219] These two dilemmas should shock us into the reality of the heinousness of sin in this depraved world and the predicament these two women found themselves.

CASE ONE. According to a police report, two men (Grady Gibson and Eddie Hart) conspired to kill the wife of Eddie to collect insurance money. This young woman was taken out into the woods, tied to a tree, and almost decapitated by Grady Gibson. He did not have sex with her; he simply killed her by almost cutting off her head. Both men, after two years of investigation by the Montgomery Police Department (Alabama), were convicted of murder. Eddie Hart, the husband of the dead woman, received a sentence of fifty years; but the other man received life without parole. He is in for life! Now, the question: Is Mrs. Gibson [220]bound to her husband, Grady Gibson, for the rest of her life simply because he did not have sex with the woman he murdered—he almost cut her head off? Does she have scriptural grounds to divorce him and remarry, even though adultery was not committed? Some say yes, others say no.

Since Mrs. Gibson's husband is incarcerated in prison for life, without a chance for parole, what is her situation in regards to divorce and remarriage? Is she bound to him for life since he did not pull off her panties and have sex with her? To begin with, Mrs. Gibson did file a motion (July 7, 1988) with the Circuit Court in Montgomery Alabama for a new trial on behalf of her husband, a former Alabama Bureau Investigation agent for the police department of Montgomery, Alabama.

However, later, she eventually divorced her husband—who is imprisoned for the rest of his life. Now the question: What is the status of the wife since the husband did not commit adultery, but murder? Since she divorced her husband, is she free to marry again? Is she bound to this man for the rest of her life? Are there any principles set forth in the Scriptures whereupon we can make a rational decision concerning her predicament? Can she remarry without sinning?[221] We also wonder what woman in her right mind would want to go back to such a brute, even if he were released from prison.

CASE TWO. On April 20, 1988, the Montgomery Advertiser published excerpts from a letter by an "abused wife." This woman testified that she "was beaten, stomped, kicked, burned with cigarettes and stabbed." She also stated that her husband "threw me into a wall so hard that my head went through the paneling. The man was also a gun fanatic. His favorite game when he was drinking was his version of Russian

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[218]See Chapter 8, "The Divorce Sayings in the Synoptics and Pauline Accounts," pp. 150-188.

[219] See Deuteronomy 24:1-4.

[220]Since Mr. Gibson was married more than once, I am speaking of his wife at the time the murder was committed.

[221]As of today (7-19-2008), Grady Gibson is still serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole. On the other hand, Eddie Hart was paroled (8-2-2004) after serving seventeen years of his fifty-year sentence. He was charged with manslaughter.

roulette. His gun, my head." Now the question is: Does God prohibit this woman to divorce her husband who is brutal, inhuman, ruthless, savage, uncaring, heartless, cold-blooded, and violent? Does God outlaw her divorce since sexual immorality was not involved? Can she divorce him and remarry without sinning if fornication was not involved? Would we say, "She is bound for life, adultery not committed"? Are there no mitigating circumstances where mercy takes precedence over law? Would Matthew 12 apply in this case? Is this a ***now*** situation?

David and the Bread of the Presence

Frequently, Christians are treated with the same legality that the religious leaders bound upon the people in the days of Christ (Matthew 5:21-48). Those leaders used their Scriptures in an illegal manner to uphold their traditions (Matthew 15:1-13), as do many Christians today. This same unconcern for the wellbeing of the person is still practiced by many leaders today, especially elders and preachers, to bring persons into conformity with their demands or face the consequences of excommunication from the so-called faithful brethren. Fred Craddock, Bandy Distinguished Professor of Preaching and New Testament, Emeritus, at Chandler School of Theology at Emory University, correctly states the problem:

> This problem is as old as the church, for there has always been a tradition preserved in sacred texts with all the uses and misuses that accompany Scripture. Jesus frequently faced the problem of being charged with flying in the face of Scripture.[222]

As mentioned above, Matthew records a confrontation of the Pharisees with Jesus (Matthew 12:1-12), in which Jesus reminds the leaders that David and his companions violated God's Law concerning the eating of the "Bread of the Presence," but Jesus indicates, according to the conversation, that they were innocent (without guilt). In this particular case of hunger, Jesus informed the leaders that "mercy" took precedence over "Law." In the course of this encounter, Jesus also explained this principle of "mercy" by reminding them of the Sabbath. Jesus corrected their theology by saying, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). In other words, Jesus is simply saying that under normal circumstances we would adhere to the Sabbath regulations, but there may be extenuating circumstances in which mercy takes precedence over Law (Sabbath keeping).

The relationship between the Old Testament incident of David (1 Samuel 21:1-6) and the <u>apparent</u>, not real, infringement of the Sabbath day by the disciples lies in the fact that on both occasions one did that which was forbidden by God and the other forbidden by the religious leaders. Jesus did not directly address the leaders' accusation against the disciples, but, rather, stood with the Pharisees on their own ground and assumed for the sake of argument that the disciples profaned the Sabbath. Jesus reasoned that since it is always "lawful" to do good and to save life on the Sabbath, then, both David and the disciples were within the "spirit" of the Law (see Isaiah 58:6-7; Luke 6:6-11; 13:10-17; 14:1-6).[223]

The same principle that Jesus set forth in this confrontation with the religious leaders may be applied to other commands of God. To apply the same logic about "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" to Matthew 5:32 is appropriate. To illustrate this point still further, neither man nor woman was made for the marriage law, but the marriage law was made for their benefit. In other words, there may be mitigating circumstances, as discussed above, wherein "mercy" takes seniority over "law." Larry Richards' (b. 1931), Christian educator, statement about the principle of mercy is to the point:

> David's need was seen by God as more important than the law's regulation. And the priest's service to Israel was, of course, more important than the Sabbath prohibition against work. In each case a principle of mercy—of deep concern for human need—took precedence over what was technically a violation of law. David and the priest broke the law but were adjudged innocent. Isn't it possible that those who suffer the tragedy of divorce and who remarry do commit

[222]Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987), 119.
[223]See end of this chapter for Scripture citations in full (117-119).

adultery, as David committed sacrilege, and yet are adjudged innocent? Doesn't the law's provision of divorce and its expectation of remarriage indicate that God can and does deal with divorce and remarriage with a mercy quite unlike the attitude of ancient and modern Pharisees who are preoccupied with legalities. . . . It is here (Mt 19) that Jesus points out that divorce was permitted because human hearts are hard, not because God desires divorce. Divorce was an expression of God's mercy, not an affirmation of his ideal will.[224]

Hezekiah and the Passover

God ordained that the Passover be observed on the 14th day of the first month of Nisan (Numbers 9:3). Yet, there were those who could not meet this requirement because of extenuating conditions beyond their control. Thus God gave an "exemption" to this regulation (9:6-7), and, as a result, God informed the Israelites that the feast could be observed on the following month on the fourteenth (9:8-12). These extenuating circumstances created an "exemption," not an "exception," to the normal procedure. This incident of Hezekiah and the Passover is an excellent illustration of biblical situational ethics. The people-in-the-situation made the difference.

According to the Chronicler (2 Chronicles 30:2-5, 18-27), Hezekiah, king of Israel, decided to celebrate the Passover "contrary to what was written" (30:18). Hezekiah discovered that the Passover "had not been celebrated in large numbers according to what was written" (30:5). Even though he had no direct word from the Lord, nevertheless, Hezekiah ordered the priest to slaughter the Passover lamb on the fourteenth day of the second month (30:15). Even though many "were not ceremonially clean" (30:17), still, he prayed for everyone who set his heart on seeking God:

> Although most of the many people who came from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun had not purified themselves, yet they ate the Passover, contrary to what was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, "May the LORD, who is good, pardon everyone [19] who sets his heart on seeking God—the LORD, the God of his fathers—even if he is not clean according to the rules of the sanctuary." [20] And the LORD heard Hezekiah and healed the people. (30:18-20)

Is this not another example of biblical situational ethics? Because of mitigating factors, God made an "exemption" to His law.

Two Brothers: Eleazar and Ithamar

Who were these two brothers? They were the sons of Aaron and the brothers of Nadab and Abihu. Eleazar and Ithamar witnessed the death of their two brothers (Leviticus 10). Why were they killed? Moses (1525-1406 BC) informs us that they disobeyed God and were destroyed. On the other hand, these other two brothers also disobeyed God, but they were not destroyed. Why were they spared? Did the heart have anything to do with the two sets of brothers? Did the heart play a part in God's reaction to the four brothers in His dispensing of judgment? Were Nadab and Abihu involved in high-handed rebellion against God's commandment? Were the actions of Eleazar and Ithamar also high-hand rebellion against God's commandment? It appears from the context of Leviticus 10 that their actions had to do with their mental state as a result of their having just witnessed the death of their two brothers.

Moses writes that Eleazar and Ithamar *burnt* the "sin offering" rather than *eat* the "sin offering" as commanded by God. To begin with, Moses was highly incensed at their actions. Moses writing in the third person says,

> When Moses inquired about the goat of the sin offering and found that it had been burned up, he was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's remaining sons, and asked, [17] "Why didn't you eat the sin offering in the sanctuary area? It is most holy; it was given to you to take away the guilt of the community by making atonement for them before the LORD. [18] Since its blood was not taken into the Holy Place, you should have eaten the goat in the sanctuary area, as I commanded." [19] Aaron replied to Moses, "Today they sacrificed their sin offering and their burnt offering before the

[224]Lawrence O. Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 234-35.

LORD, but such things as this have happened to me. Would the LORD have been pleased if I had eaten the sin offering today?" [20] When Moses heard this, he was satisfied. (Leviticus 10:16-20)

Is this biblical situational ethics? Did God exonerate their course of action because of controlling factors? Did the "situation" make the difference in God's reaction to a violation of His law?

CONCLUSION

Did Jesus teach "graded absolutism" or the principle of "mercy" over "Law"? Did Jesus illustrate this righteousness of "leniency" in His dispute with the religious leaders in Matthew 12? Jesus says that it is always lawful to do good and to save life. Jesus illustrates the principle of "to do good" and "to save life" with the example of David and the "Bread of the Presence" that mercy took priority over Law. In other words, Law gave way to mercy.

Jesus conceded that His disciples broke the *rabbinical rules* about the Sabbath, and, then, He used this episode as a basis to call attention to the principle of mercy. Jesus presented the case of David in order to call attention to the principle of kindness, even with a known violation of the Law. Even though David and his men disregarded the Law of God, nevertheless, they were guiltless. Again, we witness the standard of mercy overriding Law. Jesus develops this concept of compassion by saying, "If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:7-8). Even if the disciples had broken the Sabbath, the necessities for life (food) would have overridden Law.

Is there not a grave responsibility upon us to look at variations dictated by concrete situations in our lives before rendering a decision of condemnation? It is before the judgment of God that we are responsible for our good treatment or ill treatment toward God's people. When we fail in honoring an individual's precarious situation in life, there is no lasting worth to what they are doing. The vocation of every Christian should be renewed commitment to the triune God. Yes, there should be a renewed commitment to the words of Scriptures handed down by the Holy Spirit to assist us in loving and serving Him, the Creator of heaven and earth. May God help us to practice the words of Paul to the Christians in Rome. How do we respond to the following comments by Paul?

> Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. (Romans 14:4)

> Why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. (Romans 14:10)

> We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. [2] Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. [3] For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me"[c] [4] For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. [5] May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, [6] so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. [7] Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. (Romans 15:1-7)

The principle of "mercy" over "Law" and the idea of the "weightier" matters of the Law are still valid perceptions that need examination in dealing with conflicts in the lives of men and women. We must deal with the ***then*** and the ***now***.

[c] Psalm 69:9

FULL CITATION OF SCRIPTURES ALLUDED TO EARLIER

Isaiah 58: 6-7

Is not this the kind of fasting I
have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice
and untie the cords of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free
and break every yoke?
7 Is it not to share your food with
the hungry
and to provide the poor
wanderer with shelter—
when you see the naked, to clothe
him,
and not to turn away from your own
flesh and blood?

Luke 6:6-11

On another Sabbath he went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was shriveled. 7 The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath. 8 But Jesus knew what they were thinking and said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Get up and stand in front of everyone." So he got up and stood there. 9 Then Jesus said to them, "I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?" 10 He looked around at them all, and then said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He did so, and his hand was completely restored. 11 But they were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.

Luke 13:10-17

On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, 11 and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. 12 When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." 13 Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God. 14 Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath." 15 The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? 16 Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?" 17 When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were

Luke 14:1-6

One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. 2 There in front of him was a man suffering from dropsy. 3 Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" 4 But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him away. 5 Then he asked them, "If one of you has a son or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?" 6 And they had nothing to say.

delighted with all the wonderful things
he was doing.

This chapter (5) has focused upon the study of divorce within the community of God's people through an analysis of "graded absolutism." Many examples were set forth in order for one to follow the logic of my arguments for divorce for reasons other than just sexual unfaithfulness. We sought to reexamine many Scriptures through new eyes. Many Christians are divided over the subject of divorce. I have sought to apply a greater understanding of Scripture and toleration for those caught up in divorce. Many Christians refuse fellowship with the divorced unless it is for sexual immorality. Many believers are divided into two camps: the exception and the no-exception. The next chapter (6) explores the subject of *unity in diversity* versus *unity in conformity*. Our failure to explore the biblical mandate in this area has resulted in many Christians receiving the label "false teacher." Paul calls for toleration and a spirit of unity in spite of differences within the Christian community. Once more, the following chapter ("Unity in Diversity") calls upon all believers to reexamine old texts through new eyes.

6

Unity in Diversity

> One wants to have a God with whom one can negotiate, a religion that consists of accomplishment and return, but not a God who breaks into our life as the living Lord and seizes upon something. Such a claim disturbs the balance of power; one must remove him. It can and dare not be that one is present who calls himself the Son of God.[225]

As we seek to grasp the significance of the phrase "false prophets" in the New Testament writings, we need to rethink the traditional concept of unity within the Christian community. This chapter calls upon the reader to review old texts through new eyes in order to grasp and to maintain the unity for which our Lord Jesus prayed. The clarion call today among many sincere believers is *unity in conformity*, not *unity in diversity*. Diversity from the status quo frequently calls forth the epithet "false teacher." This chapter seeks to set the stage for the further investigation into the misuse of the phrase (false prophets/teachers) against other believers who also believe in Christ's deity and His Incarnation. This study on **unity in diversity** is based on two chapters from the Book of Romans and one chapter from the Book of First Corinthians, which study develops a correct understanding of the subject of false prophets within the Christian community. An awareness of Romans 14 and 15 and 1 Corinthians 8 should assist us in identifying more accurately the use of the phrase that is so loosely employed by many honest and genuine Christians that is not biblical.

It is significant that in Romans 14 and 15 that Paul does not indict believers as dishonorable interpreters or as false teachers for their lack of clear perception concerning the eating of meats and the keeping of certain holy days to the Lord. Even in the Corinthian correspondence, Paul does not castigate the Corinthians for their not fully grasping the utter futility of idols (1 Corinthians 8). The believers in Corinth were one because they believed in Jesus. They believed the Gospel facts—Jesus' Death, Burial, and Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:1-8).

Their salvation was not contingent upon the acuteness of the human intellect or the logical powers of the mind to sort out all the problems encountered in their acceptance of Jesus as the Way of salvation. It was belief of and response to historical facts about Jesus that resulted in salvation by grace through faith, not adherence to opinions reliant upon the sharpness of one's human brainpower. Christianity is founded upon three leading facts: (1) Jesus Christ was crucified upon Mount Calvary, (2) His body was deposited in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, and (3) He did actually rise from the dead on the third day. Christianity does not consist in matters of opinions, but upon facts.

FIRST CORINTHIANS 8

If we profess Christianity, but, at the same time, do not understand that there is only one God the Father and one Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 8:4-6) as many of the Corinthians did not fully comprehend, we wonder how the Christian community today would have reacted to one's lack of comprehension about the deity in the first century. Would the church today have accepted such individuals into the fellowship of the local congregation? Would today's fellowship of Christians have accused those individuals of being false teachers or false prophets? How did Paul react to this lack of comprehension about God? Just a casual reading of First

[225]Emil Brunner (1889-1966), *I Believe in the Living God: Sermons on the Apostles' Creed*, translated and edited by John Holden (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961), 66.

Corinthians 8 reveals that many did not fully grasp the belief that there is just one God the Father and one Lord Jesus Christ.

Did Paul point the finger at them and lay the epithet of "false prophets" on them for their deficiency of discernment? How do we stack this unpleasant mix-up about doctrine in Corinth with the many questions that carve up God's people into so many warring factions today? Some of the Corinthians understood correctly, but, on the other hand, some believers still did not recognize accurately the identity of God. How did Paul deal with such absence in knowledge? He begins this chapter by admitting: "we all possess knowledge" (8:1b). Is correct understanding the most important issue in the life of the believer?

What happens when our knowledge exceeds that of another? What is the most worthy characteristic that exemplifies our favor with God? Is it knowledge or is it love? Paul goes right to the heart of what Christian fellowship is all about: "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up" (8:1c). Do we say, "I know that I am right?" Is our fellowship with other believers based upon a relationship with Jesus through faith or is our fellowship based upon perfection in knowledge? Listen to Paul once more as he seeks to set the record straight: "The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know" (8:2). Regarding this same concept, Carl Ketcherside (1908-1989), author and editor of Mission Messenger, writes with justification:

> Those who were in Christ in the days of the apostles were in error on many points. They were mistaken about a lot of things but they were not charged with "preaching another gospel." Freedom from error is not a condition of salvation else all men would be damned. We are not saved by attainment to a certain degree of knowledge but by faith in Christ Jesus. It is by belief of facts related to him, and not by grasp of abstract truth, that we are justified before God. Certainly it is not by performance of meritorious deeds nor by legalistic conformity. When we postulate a program of justification by knowledge we hang ourselves on the gallows we have constructed to rid ourselves of others, unless we are prepared to make ourselves even more ridiculous by affirming that we know as much as God.[226]

Do we know everything we ought to know? What is God concerned about? Again, Paul, through the Holy Spirit, plunges headlong into the very heart of what matters with God: "But the man who loves God is known by God" (8:3). If we love God, God loves us in spite of our lack of perfection in knowledge. Paul now argues that it is true that there is only one God the Father and one Lord Jesus Christ, but, at the same time, he stresses that not everyone knows this (8:7). How did Paul behave in response to those who were correct in their thinking? He says: "Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak" (8:9). Are we following the example of Paul in this matter? Paul, as he seeks to summarize the attitude of toleration, cuts away all underbrush about one's own path:

> So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. [32] Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—[33] even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. [1] Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ. (10:31-33; 11:1)

Paul exercised the spirit of open-mindedness for shortage of knowledge within the fellowship of God's new community. He followed the example of Christ. Do we follow the pattern of Christ? What did Christ do? Paul describes Christ's spirit of liberality and generosity in the Roman Epistle. One can hardly read this statement of Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:31-33 without reflection upon his conclusion to Chapter Fourteen in the Book of Romans:

> We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. [2] Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. [3] For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."[c] [4] For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. [5] May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, [6] so that with one heart and mouth

[226] Carl Ketcherside (1908-1989), "Another Gospel," *Mission Messenger* 27, no 1 (January 1965): 6-7.

c Psalm 69:9

you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. [7]Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. (Romans 15:1-7)

ROMANS 14 AND 15

False teachers are not by definition those whose knowledge is inadequate. To require that we have perfect knowledge of every detail of God's Word in order to be a trustworthy teacher is to insist on inerrancy and infallibility, an impossible task, even for the most highly trained in the field of biblical interpretation. To expect such an accomplishment is to demand that one be God. Romans 14 is a chapter on how to maintain unity in diversity. There will always be differences within the Christian community. Therefore, we ought not to denounce one another as dishonest guides when we do not dot every "i" or cross every "t" in the same way.

We can no more all think alike than we can all look alike. God has never made absolute perfection in knowledge a condition of salvation; otherwise, none of us could be saved. On the other hand, we can also say that absolute freedom from error is not a condition of salvation either; otherwise, none of us could be saved. We are one in Christ because God has reconciled us unto Himself in and through Jesus, not through intellectual attainment. Toleration for differences of opinions is the subject of Romans 14 and 15, not absolute conformity in belief with other believers, whether right or wrong.

Within the natural realm as well as the spiritual realm, we recognize that there are infants, children, young men, and fathers in both domains, and, as a result of these separations, misinterpretations exist in our endeavor to understand God's Word more perfectly. This diversity resides in both worlds—secular and spiritual—because of the discrepancy of age, the degree of education, cultural background (physical and spiritual), and many other factors. And, as a result of this individuality in perception, distinctions in sharpness are unavoidable.

Is misapprehension of God's Word defiance against God? No! Misunderstanding of God's Word is not rebellion. An honest mistake of the heart is not mutiny. There is distinctiveness between a guileless infraction of the heart and an uprising against God. It is not right for us to castigate (haul over the coals) someone just because we think that our knowledge is more accurate or more developed than someone else's knowledge. We should never exclude another human being from fellowship because of a condition of mental deficiency, or feeble-mindedness, that is to say, one who does not assent to our opinions.

We are not divided over the essentials—Gospel facts—but rather we are on bad terms over issues we have inherited from our traditions. We should practice *unity in diversity* as advanced by Paul in his admonition to the believers in Rome and Corinth. In Romans, Chapter 14, Paul develops the concept of *unity in diversity* and forcefully concludes with the following counsel as stated earlier in this chapter (repetition is unavoidable and is repeated for emphasis):

> We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. [2] Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. [3]For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."[c] [4] For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. [5] May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, [6] so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. [7]Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. (Romans 15:1-7)

Who are the strong? Who are the weak? Were the weak false teachers? Were the strong true teachers? Does inaccuracy in doctrine automatically make us corruptible teachers? Does it not all depend on what the teaching is? Were some wrong in their sensitivity about the keeping of certain days holy to the Lord or the legality of eating certain meats? Were some correct in their views while others were mistaken in their views? What does fellowship mean? What does endorsement mean?

Can we be in fellowship with another person and not necessarily subscribe to the totality of what the

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c Psalm 69:9

other person believes? Are we in fellowship with persons or things? Which? Should we equate fellowship and endorsement as one and the same? For example, do we consider ourselves in fellowship with God? If so, do we maintain that God endorsees everything we believe or do? Who would be so foolish as to make such a claim? If we can be in fellowship with God without God endorsing everything we believe or do, can we not be in fellowship with other believers without endorsing everything the other believes?

What does it mean to exercise "a spirit of unity"? What does it mean to glorify God "with one heart and mouth"? What does it mean to "accept one another . . . just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God"? How does God accept us? Does He not approve of us with warts and all? Should not we take in other believers with warts and all? Has God received us with imperfection in our knowledge and famine in our daily living? Are we to receive others with shortage in their knowledge and fallibility in their daily living? These are questions that we must address. The Holy Spirit nails the coffin shut about these issues: "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (Romans 15:7).

Again, from the Scriptures, we determine that a false prophet/teacher is not automatically someone who has deficiency in understanding. The question that still confronts us though is: How do we settle from Scripture who is or who is not a spurious prophet/teacher? What meaning should we attach to the various Scriptures that speak of false prophets? The first step in explaining Scripture is to read the text. To fathom a passage involves the immediate context, the remote context, and the larger context. The *immediate context* includes verses preceding and following the reference that one is studying. On the other hand, the *remote context* may take in the entire book in which the text is found. Also, the *larger contex*t may embrace the whole of God's written Revelation. This understanding of contexts helps to determine the meaning or meanings that we attach to any distinct phrase. Otherwise, we may impose conjectured convictions on a text without due reflection upon what the author says. Without a conception of context, a person's particular context tends to shape his or her understanding and interpretation of the message.

WHO IS A FALSE PROPHET?

The first part of this chapter analyzed First Corinthians 8 and Romans 14 in order to determine how Paul dealt with differences within the various congregations. These conflicts did not discuss the philosophy of those who sought to undermine the very foundation of Christianity, namely, Jesus as the Messiah, such as I John 4:1-3. When we deny that Jesus is the Christ, we are denying the very foundation on which Christianity stands (2 John 7-11). John goes right to the jugular vein in dealing with false teachers. In fact, he pinpoints, without equivocation, the error of false teachers:

> I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. [22] Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son. [23] No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also. (1 John 2:21-23)

John calls attention to the errors of the false teachers, but, on the other hand, as stated above, it is significant that Paul did not accuse those individuals who were wrong in Corinth (1 Corinthians 8) and Rome (Romans 14 and 15) as being false teachers, for he called them brothers. As we return once more to John, we soon discover that John continues to develop the identification of false teachers in his Second Epistle. In his Second Epistle he deals with Gnostic teaching that denied that Jesus came in the flesh; he does not discuss unity in diversity over peripherals (non-essentials) as Paul did in Romans and First Corinthians. Consider John's warning:

> Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. [8]Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. [9] Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. [10]If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. (2 John 7-11)

CONCLUSION

Who is the false teacher? Who is the deceiver? Who is the antichrist? John says that the deceivers, that is to say, the antichrists, are those "who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh" (2 John 7). It is at this point that John issues a strong admonition to not receive anyone who "comes to you and does not bring this teaching" (v.10), that is, the teaching "about Christ."[227] Just as John did not contemplate the issues that Paul discussed in First Corinthians 8 and Romans 14 and 15, neither did Jude, our Lord's brother, write about these issues in his discourse on false teachers. Paul, in dealing with *unity in diversity*, did not approach the works of the flesh addressed in the Book of Jude concerning false teachers. On the other hand, neither did Jude deal with *unity in diversity*, but rather, with a denial of God's Word in the lives of men and women and a denial of Jesus as Lord. Think about the words of Jude:

> For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, *who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality* and *deny Jesus Christ* our only Sovereign and Lord. (Jude 4)

Paul also warned again *false teachers*, even as John, Jude, and Peter. But, we should not apply the phrase *false teacher* to one who is contending for the faith (Jesus' Death, Burial, and Resurrection) once delivered to the saints, as recorded by Jude (Jude 3). Paul did not so employ the term (false teacher/prophet) in his discussion of diversity within the Corinthian and Roman congregations. The difficulties in Corinth and Rome, in and of themselves, did not deny the Messiahship of Jesus, did not reject that Jesus had come in the flesh, and did not disagree with the principles of morality upon God's people. One who denies that Jesus is the Christ, one who denies the Incarnation of Christ, and one who turns the grace of God into a license for sexual immorality—this one is a false teacher. Are we following the example of Christ and Paul in our relationship with other believers who do not know as much as we know?

Again, the question that confronts us is: False Prophets: Who Are They? How do we respond to this question? Do we still answer this question based upon whether or not one agrees or disagrees with our brand of orthodoxy? The following lengthy quote from Alexander Campbell's (1788-1866) writings should help us to see the fallacy of making salvation contingent upon absolute perfection in knowledge a condition of salvation:

> Amongst Christians there is now, as there was at the beginning, a very great diversity in the knowledge of the Christian institution. There are babes, children, young men, and fathers in Christ now, as well as in the days of the Apostle John. This, from the natural gifts of God, from the diversities of age, education, and circumstances, is unavoidable. And would it not be just as rational and as scriptural to excommunicate one another, because our knowledge is less or greater than any fixed measure, as for differences of opinion or matters of speculation?
>
> Indeed, in most cases where proscription[228] and exclusions now occur in this country, the excluded are the most intelligent members of the society; and although no community will accuse a man because he knows more of his Bible than his brethren, and on this account exclude him from their communion; yet this, it is manifest, rather than heresy, (of which, however, for consistency's sake, he must be accused,) is, in truth, the real cause of separation.
>
> If God has bestowed better gifts or better opportunities on one man than another, by which he has attained more knowledge, instead of thanking God for his kindness to the community, they beg God to take him away; and if he will not be so unkind, they will at length put him from among them under the charge of heresy. In most instances the greatest error of which a brother can be guilty, is to study his Bible more than his companions—or, at least, to surpass them in his knowledge of the mystery of Christ.[229]

The present chapter (6) seeks to escape the orthodoxy of a frozen waterfall. Liberation from legalism enables us to rediscover the original understanding of God's Word. The next chapter (7) focuses on an analysis

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[227]For a detailed study of 2 John 9, see "Doctrine of Christ," Chapter 11 in this book, 215-233.

[228]Proscription: An imposed restraint or restriction—PROHIBITION

[229]Alexander Campbell (1788-1866), "To Mr. William Jones, of London, Letter IV," *Millennial Harbinger* 6, no. 3 (March 1835): 112.

of Matthew 7:15, one of the pivotal Scriptures that many Christians rely upon to justify separation from other believers. One objective in Chapter 7 is to look at this old text (Matthew 7:15) through new eyes. Unfortunately, many sincere believers cite this verse through the lenses of their traditions, not the context itself. As in the first century, tradition for many Christians is still the foundation stone for their religious heritage or culture. With the religious leaders in Jesus' day, tradition played an important role within the Jewish community.

When Jesus arrived on the scene, He immediately confronted the traditions of the elders. His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) is a classic example of this confrontation. It is still difficult for us to resist the temptation to imprison God's written Revelation in a system of human traditions. Unfortunately, many sincere Christians still fail to distinguish between God's Word and their customs. Trained ministers or theologians frequently become the pattern around which the fellowship of God builds its foundation.

7

Watch Out for False Prophets

Jesus concludes His Sermon on the Mount with His warning concerning "false prophets" (Matthew 7:15). This Scripture is frequently cited among many devout and sincere Christians when they disenfranchise other believers from their particular brand of Christianity. Yet, Christians cannot bypass this Scripture. We must come to grips with the meaning of Jesus' words. To whom did Jesus refer to when He warned His listeners about "false prophets"? Is one a "false prophet" when he or she does not subscribe to the particular views of a hard-to-please band of believers? Who were the "false prophets" in Jesus' Sermon? Just a perusal of the Sermon on the Mount along with Jesus' final words against the religious leaders (Matthew 23) should settle the question. It is illegitimate to apply this saying by Jesus to men and women who profess faith in Christ as the Messiah as well as confess that Jesus has come in the flesh. Men and women[230] who lead away from God should be avoided.

Who are those who lead away from God? Are the men and women who lead away from God simply individuals who go outside the traditions of a particular variety of orthodoxy? Is it proper to cite Jesus' words in Matthew 7:15 to anyone who dares to go outside the traditions of one's denominational beliefs? It is not uncommon for us to apply Jesus' epitaph to anyone who fails to measure up to our own religious cultural background. It is significant that the phrase *false prophet* only appears seven times in the New Testament, not always with the same connotation. A careful reading of the Scriptures that contain this phrase is quite revealing. Robert Stein, senior professor of New Testament interpretation at Southern Seminary,[231] is on target when he calls attention to the necessity of applying the correct mental perception of an isolated Scripture:

> The understanding of a text involves the correct mental perception of a text's meaning. Another way of saying this is that understanding involves a correct grasp of the pattern of meaning willed by the author. Since there is a single meaning that the author willed, each individual who understands this meaning will have the same mental grasp of the author's pattern of meaning. Some understandings may be more complete than others because of a greater perception of the

[230]A classic example of women who lead away from God is found in Jesus' letter to the church in Thyatira: "By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols" (Revelation 2:20). This woman is not condemned for teaching, but rather she is damned for what she is teaching. Another example is found in 1 and 2 Timothy concerning women who were involved with "godless myths and old wives' tales" (1 Timothy 4:7), that is to say, stories about the heathen gods and goddesses. These women were also engaged in practicing magic, which, unfortunately, is translated as "busybodies" rather than "magic" in 1 Timothy 5:13. The word *busybodies* (**περίεργοι**, *periergoi*, "magic") is a translation of the same Greek word that is translated as "practiced sorcery" (**περίεργα πραξάντων** *perierga praxantōn* , "doing curious things") in Acts 19:19. In Acts 19, Luke reports details concerning Paul's work in Ephesus, which is where Timothy was when Paul wrote to Timothy. These women were "always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7). They did not understand the Gospel of God.

[231]See "Robert Stein" [ONLINE]. Available from http://www.sbts.edu/Academics/Faculty/Theology/Robert_Stein.aspx (accessed 8 December 2008), for information:

> After giving twenty-eight years of his teaching life to Bethel Theological Seminary, Dr. Robert Stein joined the faculty of Southern Seminary in the fall of 1997. A world-renowned scholar of the synoptic Gospels, Dr. Stein has published numerous books, papers and journal articles addressing the gospels and hermeneutical issues. Among his more recent books are *Luke* in Broadman & Holman's New American Commentary, *Playing by the Rules, The Method and Message of Jesus' Teachings* and *Jesus the Messiah*.

various implications involved, but, if an understanding is correct, it must have the same mental grasp of the author's meaning as any other understanding.[232]

We quickly discover that the phrase is employed in the context of those who lead men and women away from God through the denial that Jesus is the Messiah, or through ethical conduct that does not glorify God. Even when writers of the New Testament do not employ this expression (false prophets) to warn believers about the teachings and practices of certain men and women, we are not left in the dark as to the concerns of the writers in calling attention to behavior and beliefs that will damn our souls (see Revelation 2:18-29). Once more, we need to see old texts through new eyes. This chapter seeks to understand this utterance as employed by Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount in order to preserve the unity for which Jesus prayed.

As we read this examination of Matthew 7:15, hopefully, we will not allow our own prior frame of reference to be the determining factor in seeking to understand this most abused text. We frequently, though unconsciously, employ the Bible to prove a biased perspective against anyone who does not toe-the-line in harmony with our particular fellowship. The interpreter lives in his or her own subjective world. If we wish to unpack Matthew 7:15, we must be committed to the context. Many groups within the Stone/Campbell Movement utilize this Scripture to justify separation from other believers over points that God has never addressed; especially, one's attitude toward a so-called worship service with it five ritualistic acts. Duncan Ferguson (b. 1937), Vice President for Academic Affairs and Professor of Religious Studies at Alaska Pacific University, is correct when he writes: "Whenever anyone attempts to 'hear' what the text has to say, that person inevitably hears and identifies the sounds from within a prior structure of experiences or preunderstanding."[233]

EXPOSITION OF THE PHRASE *FALSE PROPHETS* IN THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Just a perusal of Matthew's Gospel reveals that this phrase is only employed three times, each time by Jesus (7:15; 24:11, 24). It is significant that in all three occurrences, the phrase is applied to those who seek to lead people away from God. In Matthew 7:15, the emphasis on false prophets is associated with the Pharisees and the Scribes (teachers of the Law). After the baptism of Jesus, we find Jesus in Galilee. It is in this geographical location that we discover Jesus preaching His now famous Sermon known as the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus warns His disciples about a righteousness that is external, a righteousness that does not proceed from the heart. Toward the end of His Sermon, Jesus speaks of the religious leaders with a stinging rebuke:

> Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. [16] By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? (Matthew 7:15-16)

What precipitated this warning and condemnation of the religious leaders? As we read carefully the Sermon on the Mount, we quickly discover that Jesus is dealing with the ethical behavior of the leaders in Israel. In this Sermon, Jesus begins by expounding upon the characteristics that must be visible in the life of His followers. In setting forth kingdom behavior, Jesus gives a contrast between the conduct of the religious leaders of His day and the performance God expects of His people. In this antithesis, we are immediately introduced to the distinctiveness of "false teachers" versus the uniqueness of "true teachers."

Jesus initiates His Sermon on the Mount with patterns of behavior that true prophets/teachers will practice and encourage others to carry out in their lives. In this renowned Sermon, Jesus commences with actions that exemplify behavior that pleases God: (1) "Blessed are the poor in spirit" [Matthew 5:3]; "Blessed are those who mourn" [5:4]; "Blessed are the meek" [5:5]; "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" [5:6]; "Blessed are the merciful" [5:7]; "Blessed are the pure in heart" [5:8]; "Blessed are the peacemakers" [5:9]. In these beatitudes, Jesus stresses that we must be bankrupt in spirit, humble in attitude,

[232]Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 49.

[233]Duncan S. Ferguson, *Biblical Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1986), 6. In 1993, Ferguson is listed as Director, Committee on Higher Education, Presbyterian (U.S.A) Louisville, Kentucky.

gentle in lifestyle, hungering and thirsting after holiness, exhibiting mercy, developing purity, and seeking to promote peace, not discord.

The true teacher longs for the virtues that belong to God. After enumerating the beatitudes, Jesus continues to explain to His disciples how men and women are to put into practice right conduct that gives pleasure to God. He demonstrates this by giving detailed instructions concerning murder (5:21-26), adultery (5:27-30), divorce (5:31-32), oaths (5:33-37), retaliation (5:38-42), behavior toward enemies (5:43-48), correct motive in giving (6:1-4), proper attitude in prayer (6:5-15), legitimate aim in fasting (6:16-18), setting proper priorities (6:19-24), disposition of trust in God (6:25-34), and an admonition to put an end to censorious judging (7:1-6).

Sandwiched between the beatitudes (5:1-16) and the erroneous teachings of the "Pharisees and the teachers of the law" (5:21-7:1-6), Jesus gives a synopsis of the relevancy of the Law (5:17-20).[234] To set the tone for a proper interpretation of the phrase false prophets in Matthew 7:15, the first employment of this phrase in Matthew's Gospel, it is necessary to eliminate difficulties that stand in the way of listening anew to the biblical text. We need to cut our teeth on the concrete meaning of "false prophets" in the light of its context, not church tradition.

What did Jesus say about the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law? Were these men the "false prophets" in Matthew 7:15? Is not Matthew 7:15 the climax of the Sermon on the Mount, along with the two illustrations of the wise and foolish builders? Is Jesus not warning against the behavioral habits of the religious leaders of His day? Did He not say, "By their fruit you will recognize them" (7:16)? Were the religious leaders concerned about justice and mercy, the poor, and the widows? Or were they more concerned about rituals than they were with reference to things that mattered to God? Jesus called upon the disciples to reevaluate and reinterpret what had been handed down to them through the "tradition of the elders." The religious leaders of that day, equivalent to preachers and teachers of our day, were so used to reading the Scriptures as they had been taught by generations of interpreters that they identified their interpretation with the Word of God itself.[235]

An excellent illustration of identification of our interpretation with the Word of God is from Jesus' skirmish with the "Pharisees and teachers of the law" (15:1) over "the tradition of the elders" (Matthew 15:1-20). These "Pharisees and teachers of the law" questioned Jesus about His disciples' behavior concerning the "tradition of the elders" (15:2), and, in response to their question, Jesus rebuked them for their substitution of tradition for the "command of God" (15:3). This observation should prepare us to understand more clearly Jesus' attention to the Law in His Sermon. The "traditions of the elders" made it almost impossible to read the Bible without spectacles. Thus, Jesus, in His Sermon, went right to the heart of the matter in calling attention to the "false prophets":

> Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. [18] I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. [19] Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. [20] For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:17-20)

In this pericope (section or individual unit), Jesus draws a contrast between two kinds of people. Apparently, there were those who did not keep the commandments of God and, at the same time, taught others to break them (See also 15:1-20). On the other hand, there were those who practiced and taught the commandments of God. Again, it is the individual who taught others to break God's commandments whom Jesus addressed toward the end of the Sermon on the Mount (7:15). Beginning with Matthew 5:21 and concluding with Matthew 5:48, Jesus contrasted His teachings with the teachings of the religious leaders. He

[234]See Chapter 1 ("Relevance of the Old Testament") of this book for a detailed analysis of the relevancy of the Old Testament (pp. 1-25).

[235]For a detained study of the religious leaders and their traditions in the time of Christ, see Chapter 4 ("Political Power of the Pharisees") in this book (pp. 78-92).

begins by calling attention to what they had heard from the teachers of the Law: "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago" [**τοῖ ἀρχαίοις**, *toi archaios*, "to the ancients"] (5:21); on the other hand, Jesus gives the true interpretation of the Law by saying: "But I tell you" [**δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν**, *de legō hymin*] (5:22).[236]

Since Jesus dealt with the "Pharisees and the teachers of the law" in His Sermon on the Mount, this understanding should facilitate a clearer view of these false teachers by acquainting ourselves with their known behavior. Just what role do the Pharisees and Scribes (teachers of the Law) play in Matthew's narrative about Christ? It is worthy of note that Matthew opens his book with John's confrontation with these religious leaders (Matthew 3) and closes his book with Jesus' strong rebuke of these same Pharisees and teachers of the Law (Matthew 23).[237] This group plays such a major role in Jesus' ministry that Matthew introduces his readers to this group of religious leaders in the inauguration of John's ministry:

> But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? [8] Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. (3:7-8)

John the Baptist called upon the Pharisees and Sadducees to "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance" (3:8). In this same vein, Jesus, after cataloging a list of fruits, said, "By their fruit you will recognize them" (7:15). As mentioned above, Jesus begins His Sermon with a reference to the "Pharisees and teachers of the law" (5:20). On two other occasions (12:38 and 15:1), Matthew combines the Pharisees and teachers of the Law in a confrontation with Jesus. In one of these wars of words, they wanted a sign from heaven to authenticate Jesus as the Messiah. But, once more, Jesus exposed their hypocrisy (12:38-45). These religious leaders played an important role in Matthew's account of Jesus' ministry. For example, Matthew employed the term "Pharisees" twenty-eight times and the phrase "teachers of the law" nineteen times[238]

THE FIRST MAJOR CONTROVERSY

To assist us in our understanding of Matthew 7:15, we need to reread Matthew's Gospel in order to get a bird's-eye view of the whole scenario of Jesus' encounter with the religious leaders. The first major controversy with the religious leaders occurs in Matthew 9. In this chapter, Jesus rebukes the leaders of Israel for their "insincerity." Jesus had just performed a number of miracles (Chapter 8). For instance, [1] He healed a man with leprosy (8:1-4); [2] He healed the centurion's servant (8:5-13); [3] He healed Peter's mother-in-law and cast out demons and healed all the sick (8:14-17); [4] He calmed the storm (8:28-34); [5] He healed two demon-possessed men (8:28-34); and, finally, He healed a paralytic (9:1-2).

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[236]The prevailing interpretation of "You have heard that it was said" (KJV) is generally credited with the teachings of the Old Testament, but this does not appear to be correct in light of the context. In this Sermon, Jesus is drawing attention to the original intent of the Law versus the teachings of the religious leaders. For one to follow these teachers of the Law is tantamount to following a "false prophet."

[237]Matthew also employs a number of literary techniques to call attention to the importance of certain subjects. For example, Matthew introduces us to baptism in John's ministry: (1) baptism of the people [3:1-12] and (2) the baptism of Jesus [3:13-17], and, then, Matthew concludes his Gospel with Jesus' command to baptize (28:16-20). Another characteristic that is quite interesting is Matthew's report of the life of Christ; for example, He starts his book, following the genealogy of Christ, with the teachings of John and the teachings of Jesus (Sermon on the Mount—5:1-7:28), and, then, concludes his book with Jesus emphasis on "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (28:20). Following the baptism of Jesus, Matthew also informs us that Jesus "went throughout Galilee teaching in their synagogues" (4:23) and, then, immediately, gives the substance of that teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. For a detailed study of the Book of Matthew, see Chapter 2 in this book ("A Literary Analysis of the Gospel of Matthew"), pp. 26-62.

[238]Matthew makes reference to the Pharisees twenty-eight times in his Gospel: 3:7; 5:20; 9:11, 14, 34; 12:2, 14, 24, 38; 15:1, 12; 16:1, 6, 11, 12; 19:3; 21:45; 22:15, 34, 41; 23:2, 13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29; 27:62. In the Gospels, there are seventy-nine occurrences of the "Pharisees" in seventy-seven verses. Matthew makes reference to the "teachers" of the law nineteen times: 2:4; 5:20; 7:29; 9:3; 12:38; 15:1; 16:21; 17:10; 20:18; 21:15; 23:2, 13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29; 26:57; 27:41. In the Gospels, there are fifty-five occurrences of the "teachers of the law" in fifty-five Bible verses. In order for one to understand Jesus' caution in Matthew 7:15, it would be helpful for one to read the context of the above-mentioned Bible verses.

As a result of these miracles, the leaders of Israel reacted negatively toward His healing ministry. Immediately following the healing of the paralytic (9:1-2), Jesus reacted strongly toward their inner thoughts. Matthew writes: "At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, 'This fellow is blaspheming!'" (9:3). Notice that this accusation of blasphemy was not verbalized but remained within their own evil minds. But Jesus looked into the inner recesses of their depraved minds and said, "Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts?" (9:4). For the first time in Matthew's Gospel, the religious leaders and Jesus have direct contact. These controversies foreshadowed the final significant debate that Jesus had with the leaders of Israel. Jesus' ministry began with conflict and ended with conflict.

THE LAST MAJOR CONTROVERSY

This last argument took place during the last week of Jesus' ministry. The following is a brief summary of the events that transpired during Jesus' final week:

- The Triumphal Entry (21:1-11)
- The Cleansing of the Temple (21:12-17)
- The Last Controversies with the Jewish Leaders (21:18—23:39)
- The Olivet Discourse concerning the End of the Age (24-25)
- The Anointing of Jesus' Feet (26:11-13)
- The Arrest, Trials, and Death of Jesus (26:14-27:66)
- The Resurrection (28)

During this final week (Passion Week), the hostilities with the religious leaders escalate (Chapters 21-23), and then they put Him to death (Chapters 26-27). These leaders continue to see themselves as the lawful leaders of Israel and, at the same time, the legitimate interpreters of Scripture and the official holders of their religious heritage or traditions. Chapter 21 narrates [1] Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem (21:1-11), [2] Jesus at the temple (21:12-17), and [3] the withering of the fig tree (21:18-22). It was then, according to Matthew, that the chief priest and elders questioned the authority of Jesus: "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you this authority?" (21:23).

Again, as in His earlier major encounter with the religious leaders, He exposes them for their hypocrisy. To begin with, Jesus questioned them about the origin of John's baptism (21:24-27). In their response, they revealed their true character in the same way that they had manifested when they went out to hear John the Baptist preach in the wilderness (3:7-10). Prior to this last great controversy (Chapters 21-23), Jesus had previously, according to the apostle John, brought to their attention two facts: [1] that their existence did not originate in God, and [2] that their allegiance belonged to Satan (John 8:13, 44).

Matthew, too, records the head-on clash that led to Jesus' allegations (Matthew 21-22). Following the narration of this clash, Matthew gives the reaction of the religious leaders concerning Jesus' parables: "When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them" (21:45). Matthew further informs his readers that "they looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet" (21:46). Earlier, in the beginning of His ministry, the disciples of Jesus had cautioned Jesus about His remarks against the Pharisees.

> Then the disciples came to him and asked, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?"
> He replied, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. [14] Leave them; they are
> blind guides.[e] If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit." (15:12-14)

This final controversy with the religious leaders was not something new with Jesus.[239] The climax of Jesus' ministry concludes with His final denunciation of these false prophets. Matthew, once more, as he brings

[e] Some manuscripts *guides of the blind*

[239] See also Matthew 15:1-14.

to an end his Gospel, opens this discourse of controversy with Jesus questioning these evil leaders. For example, He interrogates these insincere men about John's baptism, as stated above, and after their refusal to answer His question about John's baptism (21:24-27), He responds with three parables that condemn these dishonest leaders: [1] The Parable of the Two Sons (21:28-32); [2] The Parable of the Tenants (21:33-46); and [3] The Parable of the Wedding Banquet (22:1-11).

THE PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS

> "What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.' [29] 'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. [30] Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go. [31] Which of the two did what his father wanted?" "The first," they answered. Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. [32] For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him." (21:28-32)

In the Parable of the Two Sons (21:28-32), He rebukes the Jewish leaders for their refusal to change their minds and believe, even though they had seen God at work in Him. As we read Matthew's narrative of the events, we cannot help but wonder if his readers did not reflect upon these same leaders in the prologue to his Gospel when he wrote:

> When he [Herod] had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ[c] was to be born. [5] "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: [6] 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.'"[d] (2:4-6)

This Parable of the Two Sons is a slap-in-the-face against the false prophets in Matthew 7:15—and they knew it. Following this parable, Jesus presented another parable—The Parable of the Tenants.

THE PARABLE OF THE TENANTS

> "Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. [34] When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. [35] The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. [36] Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. [37] Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. [38] But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' [39] So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. [40] Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants? [41] 'He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,' they replied, 'and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.'" [42] Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone[a]; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes'[b]? [43] Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. [44] He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed."[c] [45] When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. [46] They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet. (21:33-46)

In this second parable (21:33-46), Jesus demonstrates that the leaders of Israel failed to meet their responsibilities to God (21:34-36). Even when God sent His Son, they rejected Him (21:37-40). With these parables, Jesus places the religious leaders in the history of rejection of God's Anointed One. God is now giving

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[c] Or *Messiah*
[d] Micah 5:2
[a] Or *cornerstone*
[b] Psalm 118:22, 23
[c] Some manuscripts do not have verse 44.

the vineyard to those who will accept Jesus (21:41-44). Matthew makes known to his readers that the leaders knew that these three parables were spoken against them (21:45). Instead of repentance, the leaders looked for a way to arrest Him (21:46). These leaders are the false prophets of Matthew 7:15. Once more, Jesus presented another parable to draw attention to their rejection of the One whom God sent—The Parable of the Wedding Banquet.

THE PARABLE OF THE WEDDING BANQUET

> Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: [2] "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. [3]He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. [4]Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.' [5] But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. [6]The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. [7]The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. [8] Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. [9]Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' [10]So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. [11]But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. [12]'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless. [13] "Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' [14] For many are invited, but few are chosen." (22:1-14)

In this third parable (22:1-18), Jesus makes the same point about the relationship of the religious leaders and God's kingdom. This parable is a direct rebuke against the leaders. The major themes of this parable are: [1] The king prepares a wedding banquet (22:2); [2] those invited find excuses not to attend and, then kill those sent with invitations (22:3-6); [3] the king responds by destroying their city as punishment[240] and invites outsiders to attend (22:8-10); and [4] the leaders are warned that if they do not dress properly, then they will be thrown out (22:11-14). Jesus nails the coffin shut on these false teachers in Matthew 7:15.

THE CONSPIRACY OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Now, four scenes follow these parables in which various combinations of the religious leaders combine their efforts to defeat and to put an end to this supposed troublemaker (22:15-22). The various sects combined their efforts to work together in order to discredit Jesus in the eyes of the people. Immediately following the Parable of the Wedding Banquet, we observe the Pharisees and the Herodians in a clandestine operation to try to entrap Him. Matthew preserves this undercover operation for the extermination of Jesus.

Pharisees and Herodians

> Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. [16]They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are. [17] Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" [18]But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? [19] Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, [20] and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?" [21] "Caesar's," they replied. Then he said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." [22] When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away. (22:15-22)

[240]Jesus develops this destruction more fully in Matthew 24.

The first scene combines the Pharisees and the Herodians. These two groups schemed together to try to silence Him. They tried to lay a trap for Him over the payment of taxes to Caesar (22:15-16). Insincerity controls this pericope. In this showdown, Jesus calls these religious leaders hypocrites (22:18). Why did He call them hypocrites? Matthew informs his readers that Jesus knew "their evil intent" (22:18). In the next scene, we observe the extreme insincerity of the Sadducees in questioning Him about marital relationships after the resurrection.

Sadducees

That same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. [24] "Teacher," they said, "Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and have children for him. [25]Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. [26]The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh. [27] Finally, the woman died. [28]Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?" [29]Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. [30]At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. [31]But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, [32] 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'[a]? He is not the God of the dead but of the living." [33]When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching. (22:23-33)

The second scene embraces the Sadducees questioning Him about marriage at the resurrection (22:23-33)—they did not believe in the resurrection (22:23). They were spiritually blind in their understanding of the Scriptures (22:29-31); they were also spiritually blind in that they did not understand the power of God (22:29). Again, we recognize an underhanded manipulation to catch Him in an entanglement that they imagined was hopeless to escape. But they failed just as their cohorts' efforts also misfired in their attempt to try to get Him in hot water with the people or with the authorities. In the next episode, we look at an expert in the Law trying his hand.

Pharisees

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. [35]One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: [36] "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" [37] Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'[a] [38]This is the first and greatest commandment. [39] And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'[b] [40]All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (22:34-40)

The third episode involves their efforts to entrap Him over the greatest commandment in the Law (22:34-35). Jesus knew that the Pharisees were devious, sly, dishonest, foxy, crooked, and shrewd; He knew that this question was to test Him. Thus, Jesus in response to their question also asked them a question about who Christ is.

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, [42] "What do you think about the Christ[a]? Whose son is he?" "The son of David," they replied. [43] He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says, [44] 'The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.'[b]45] If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?" [46] No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions. (22:41-46)

[a] Exodus 3:6
[a] Deut. 6:5
[b] Lev. 19:18
[a] Or *Messiah*
[b] Psalm 110:1

The fourth incident embodies the gathering together of the Pharisees. Jesus took advantage of this occasion and asked them to answer the question: "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" (22:42), but they refused to answer (22:41-45). The religious leaders abandon their attempt to show that He posed a theological threat to their traditions through His exposition to the Law. As we reflect upon the question Jesus asked the Pharisees, surely the readers of this Gospel must have recalled this same question to the apostles (16:13-20). During His conflict (21:18-23:39), Jesus goes to the very heart of their problems: "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God" (22:29).

SEVEN WOES AGAINST THE LEADERS OF ISRAEL

Following this final conflict with the religious leaders, Jesus summarizes their many faults and addresses them as "hypocrites" and "blind guides" (Matthew 23). In His brief explanation of the leaders, He warns His disciples to obey them, not to copy them: "So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach" (23:3).

Matthew 23 details one of the most graphic descriptions available in all of Scripture about the decadence of Israel's leaders. Jesus issues seven woes against the religious leaders (23:13-33). Before enunciating the seven woes, He, like a bolt of lightning, goes to the very core of their corrupt nature: "Everything they do is done for men to see" (23:5).[241] The seven woes announced by Jesus are devastating to these leaders. This detailed analysis is given in order that one may ascertain beyond the shadow of a doubt, as to whom Jesus had in mind when He spoke of false prophets in Matthew 7:15). The following is His stinging condemnation of the false prophets issued in seven woes:

1. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. (23:13-14)

2. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are. (23:15)

3. Woe to you, blind guides! You say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.' You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? You also say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.' You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it. (23:16-22)

4. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. (23:23-24)

5. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. (23:25-26)

6. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. (23:27-28)

7. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. (23:29; full text is 23:29-39)

[241]In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned His disciples about external behavior performed for show. In that Sermon, Jesus discloses the same mindset (Matthew 6:1-8) that He addresses in Matthew 23.

In this conversation against the religious leaders, Jesus castigates them as "blind" five times (22:16, 17, 19, 24, 26) and as "hypocrites" six times (23:13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29). They did not understand the important things in God's Revelation. These leaders did not go for inner purity but were content with externals (23:23, 27-28). They were faultless in their observance of their rituals, but they were short on "justice, mercy and faithfulness" (23:23). This inner decay was so rampant among the religious leaders that Jesus issued His scathing attack against their unethical behavior. Jesus confronted these leaders head-on in their full-fledged, legalistic, ritualistic, and hair-splitting teachings (23:15). Consider the following judgments voiced by Jesus in His reaction to the religious leaders' hypocrisy:

- Brood of vipers! (23:33)
- Lawless (23:23, 28)
- Covetous (23:25)
- Self-indulgent (23:25)
- Hypocrites (23:28)
- Abusive (23:34)
- Murderous (23:34-35)

Jesus' castigation of the above leaders' unethical behavior is not the whole story. In fact, they enter into a conspiracy with other leaders in order to bring about the death of Jesus. For instance, Matthew concludes his Gospel with a reference to this conspiracy on the part of the leaders to eliminate Jesus.

> Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, [4] and they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him. [5] "But not during the Feast," they said, "or there may be a riot among the people." (26:3-4)

Matthew portrays the stealth employed by the so-called religious leaders to bring about the crucifixion of Jesus. They themselves do not openly arrest Jesus, but rather they employed Judas for this clandestine operation (26:14-16). Next, observe how they hid behind the crowd that they sent to arrest Him (26:47). Then, even in the trial they employed false testimony and false witnesses to gain conviction (26:59-60). Again, they also accused Jesus of blasphemy in order to give credence to their condemnation of Him (26:65-68). Once again, while Jesus was on the Cross, they mocked Him (27:41-43). And finally, they even went so far as to try to frustrate the Resurrection by sealing and guarding the tomb (27:62-66).

CONCLUSION

Throughout the Gospel of Matthew, the religious leaders are presented in a very unfavorable light. They rejected God's point of view about His Son. They acted without authority from God. Jesus acknowledges that they have no God-given mandate to lead the children of Israel; in fact, they are children of Satan (12:24-37). Jesus accuses them of being of the Devil (13:36-43; 15:12-13). These leaders are so corrupt and evil and dishonest that they cannot recognize the power and presence of God's initiative in the history of salvation (21:23). Jesus held them responsible for the future destruction of Jerusalem (22:7). Following His seven woes, Jesus foretells the destruction of their city (chapter 24). As Matthew concludes his life of Christ, surely his readers must have reflected upon Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in which He forewarned His disciples: "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves" (7:15).

My objective in writing this chapter on men and women who lead away from God is not to attack those who apply Matthew 7:15 to other Christians who often disagree with the "party cry," but rather to assist these individuals in handling correctly God's Word. The chief objective of this study is to help preserve the unity for which Jesus prayed in His priestly prayer (John 17). Matthew 7:15 is frequently misapplied by many sincere Christians within the twenty-five or more divisions within the Stone/Campbell Movement. Yet, this epithet, or label, is frequently applied by other denominations to condemn those who do not subscribe to the status quo.

Hopefully, this analysis of Matthew 7:15 will help individuals from every denomination to focus more on the context when they want to understand the intent of the author. There is a need, I believe, to guard against interpretations that may not, in spite of all their sincerity, ring true to the biblical Revelation itself. Often, subjective interpretations and dogmatic approaches by many Christians do much to deny the very Scriptures they claim to uphold.

Leaders (preachers, elders, and editors) should be very careful about superimposing upon a text their own speculative and subjective interpretation in order to avoid the very error that Jesus condemned among the religious leaders. May God help every Christian not to apply this Scripture (Matthew 7:15) to believers who hold to the use of Sunday school, individual communion cups, wine, grape juice, manner of breaking the bread in the Lord's Supper, the treasury, Bible colleges, instrumental music, hand-clapping, solo singing in the assembly, choirs, and so on.

Are we hearing this text afresh? We should not allow our traditions to stand in the way of listening once again to this biblical passage. We are so used to reading this Scripture as we have been taught by generations of godly men and women that for us to question the traditional interpretation is to question Scripture itself. As God's people, we must learn to have another look at the context of Scripture and reinterpret hand-me-down interpretations that have been cherished for centuries. Since we are a product of our own religious culture, it is difficult, if not almost impossible, for us to read the Bible without spectacles. Unconsciously, the interpretation of the church fathers has become the watchword of orthodoxy in the interpretation of this frequently altered Scripture (Matthew 7:15).

It is not exceptional for the biblical message to be limited by some predetermined interpretive grid. One of the greatest ways to be sure that our interpretation of a passage remains faithful to our tradition is to ignore the context. Our approach to Matthew 7:15 through a predetermined "interpretive filter"—an interpretation handed down through generations of interpreters—should be avoided with extreme care. If we approach this Scripture, or any Scripture for that matter, with strong subjective biases, we will view God's Word through colored glasses.

In concluding this study on false prophets in Matthew 7:15, we must again ask ourselves the question: "How did Christ employ this stinging phrase?" **We should guard ourselves against manipulating biblical material to support our prior ecclesiastical interest**. We must struggle to liberate the New Testament from the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries of ecclesiastical assumptions. We must always be on lookout to prevent our religious reasoning and enthusiasm from being substituted for ungrounded interpretations of our brains. We must ever guard against the fallacy of reading our own experience into the world of the text.

The next chapter (8) also explores other texts that are often interpreted with wooden literalness. **One objective of this book is to call attention to the fact that we need to reexamine old texts through new eyes.** The divorce sayings in the Synoptics and Pauline writings are some of the most abused Scriptures within the community of Christ. This chapter opens up many Scriptures in order to apply biblical principles to the ***now*** of our everyday lives. Are there biblical principles that can be gleaned from the sacred writings that will enable us to draw conclusions that will help alleviate the emotional stress that we often find ourselves confronting? Hopefully, the next chapter will help to make less burdensome the weight of guilt that so many Christians carry as a result of a tragic divorce. Again, we need to explore old texts through new eyes.

8

The Divorce Sayings

> Without discussing immediately the correctness or incorrectness of these interpretations, it may be profitable to consider the danger of approaching the Scriptures with preconceived ideas on what a text can or cannot say. Regardless of which interpretation is correct, it is frightening that the meaning of the text no longer serves as a final authority. On the contrary, it is the present theology that predetermines what the text means and that serves as a final authority![242]

The "divorce sayings" in the Synoptic Gospels and the teachings of Paul are interpreted with a diversity of explanations. Each interpreter assumes that his or her clarifications of the divorce sayings are God given. There is no room for disagreement once a pronouncement is made. A perusal of the various religious journals reveals that the most able and accomplished preachers differ widely in their explanations of the "bill of divorcement" statements. We differ widely in our understanding of the subject of divorce and remarriage. We have allowed our discernment about the termination of a marriage to fracture the fellowship of believers. We make no room for differences. We must agree with certain or convinced interpreters or suffer the consequences.

We struggle daily over how we are to interpret the divorce remarks when confronted with mitigating situations surrounding depraved behavior or circumstances, which extenuating circumstances often alter our station in life. For example, have we ever considered the predicament of someone whose spouse has committed murder? How should we react to physical abuse by one's spouse? Does God demand that we stay married to someone who is confined to prison for the rest of his or her life because of some degenerate action committed by the spouse imprisoned? Does God command us to live with someone who is "hell" on earth? If someone is guilty of murder, not sexual immorality, is the other partner committed to the murderer for the rest of his or her life? We do not always know what course of action to pursue when we confront surroundings beyond our control.

Since divorce and remarriage are prevalent in every society, as it was also in Jesus' society, it is incumbent upon us to seek answers from principles set forth in Holy Scripture in trying to ferret out the intricate problems we face daily concerning the dilemma of divorce and remarriage. In pursuit of correct answers about how to react in all surroundings, we soon discover that there are no "pat" answers. This research pursues two avenues of thought to cope with the problem of divorce and remarriage: (1) exaggeration in the divorce sayings, and (2) the principle of mercy over law.

EXAGGERATION

Divorce is not always obtained on the basis of "sexual immorality." Does this lack of adultery always violate the divorce sayings in the Synoptic Gospels and Pauline writings? Are there any valid reasons for divorce other than "fornication"? Did Jesus teach that there are no *exemptions* to the marriage bond other than "fornication" or "adultery"? When Matthew, Mark, and Luke recorded the divorce sayings, did they consider the pronouncements of Jesus a dissertation on the subject of divorce and remarriage? Did Jesus contemplate

[242]Robert H. Stein, *Interpreting Puzzling Texts in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 95.

wife abuse,[243] husband abuse, child abuse, desertion, and withholding of conjugal rights? In Jesus' response to the Pharisees in Matthew 19:1-12, did Jesus have in mind such crimes as murder and armed robbery on the part of one of the partners? Did He contemplate these atrocities in His Sermon on the Mount when He discussed the teachings of the Pharisees and scribes about divorce and remarriage (Matthew 5:31-32)? Are these hypothetical cases or are these circumstances that need review in making a judgment about the innocent party?

Are these acts of violence included in the word "fornication" or did Jesus exclude every crime except "sexual immorality"? Were these words of Jesus simply "overstatement" or "exaggeration" to emphasize the original intent of God? These are questions that require response. When we limit divorce and remarriage to "sexual immorality," we often create impossible situations for individuals who suffer from circumstances beyond their control. For example, consider the following trauma that two women experienced in their marital relationships. One of the husbands was involved in a very heinous murder and the other husband was deeply involved in wife abuse of great degradation.

CASE ONE. The following is a brief scenario of two men who conspired to kill the wife of one of them. According to a police report, Grady Gibson[244] and Eddie Hart combined forces to kill Eddie's wife to collect insurance money ($100,000). Eddie (the murdered woman's husband) and Grady collected the money, but their clandestine operation was not discovered until almost two years after the killing—both men were eventually brought to trial. One of the men, Grady, who almost decapitated Eddie's wife, received life without parole for his part in the homicide. On the other hand, Eddie, the dead woman's husband, received a fifty-year sentence.[245] Now the dilemma!

What is the status of Mrs. Gibson, the wife of Grady? Is Mrs. Gibson bound to her husband for life? Since Grady did not pull Eddie's wife's "panties" off, does Mrs. Gibson have the right to divorce Grady and marry someone else? What did Grady do? He just almost cut the woman's head off. Now, according to some, if he had just had sex with her, then, Mrs. Gibson would have a biblical reason for divorce. But since he just almost cut her head off—"bound for life" is the battle cry of many preachers and elders.[246]

CASE TWO**.** In 1988, the *Montgomery Advertiser* (20th of April) published excerpts from a letter by an "abused wife." She wrote that she "was beaten, stomped, kicked, burned with cigarettes and stabbed." This is

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[243]James O'Reilly, "Wife Beating: The Silent Crime" *Time* 5 (September 1983), 23, writes:

> Nearly 6 million wives will be abused by their husbands in any one year. Some 2,000 to 4,000 women are beaten to death annually. The nation's police spend one third of their time responding to domestic-violence calls. Battery is the single major cause of injury to women, more significant than auto accidents, rapes or muggings.

Again, he captures the mentality of many preachers, elders, or editors of religious journals, when they encourage the battered-wife to stay in such a relationship:

> If the woman does not leave or seek help after the first episode, it can be taken as a sign of acquiescence, which usually leads to more violence. But it is extremely difficult to pack up and go, even if a woman can afford to. Explains Jane Tolliver, a counselor in the Atlanta Y.W.C.A'S battered-women's program: "<u>They've been told by their ministers and their families that a good woman can change a man</u>." These women represent society's traditional values. Says Tolliver: "They are nurturing. They want successful marriages. And it is precisely those things that trap them" (Ibid., 24, the "underlining" is my emphasis--RDB).

[244]As of today (7-19-2008), Grady Gibson is still serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole. On the other hand, Eddie Hart was paroled (8-2-2004) after serving seventeen years of his fifty-year sentence. He was charged with manslaughter.

[245]I am reporting this story as it appeared in the newspaper as well as from relatives of the slain girl. This story illustrates the extravagance that many leaders revert to in their wooden interpretation of the divorce sayings. Some individuals have questioned whether they were guilty or not. I am using this scenario as a classic example of the extremes that numerous leaders take concerning the divorce sayings.

[246]This is no joke. It is true! I have talked with a number of preachers, who say, "Bound for life." Does this kind of reasoning remind one of the reasoning that Jesus encountered with the religious leaders in His day? The Pharisees, teachers of the law, and elders of the people had no concept of "mercy" over "law." This philosophy is still in vogue by many religious leaders today, especially preachers and elders. I thank God that this kind of attitude is not prevalent with all preachers and elders. I know of many who repudiate such illogical thinking.

not all! There is much more to this horror. She further describes her mistreatment: "He threw me into a wall so hard that my head went through the paneling. The man was also a gun fanatic. His favorite game when he was drinking was his version of Russian roulette. His gun, my head."

Now the dilemma! Does God expect a woman to live with a man like that? Is this woman forbidden by God to divorce this brutal, inhuman, ruthless, savage, uncaring, heartless, cold-blooded, violent, sick person, simply because "sexual immorality" was not involved? If she does divorce, can she remarry without sinning? Many would say bound for life! Why? Well, you know that adultery was not committed!

Is there a biblical solution to the apparent problem? Is there the possibility of exaggeration in Jesus' statements concerning divorce? In considering the dilemmas of these two women, we should examine the use of *overstatement* as used by our Lord in His teaching techniques. Not only did Jesus avail Himself of this method, but also the Holy Spirit employs this procedure throughout the Scriptures. By not giving attention to this teaching style, one may misapply and pervert the Bible.

Overstatement and Hyperbole

Exaggeration consists of *hyperbole* as well as *overstatement*. What is the distinction between *hyperbole* and *overstatement*? Robert Stein, Senior Professor of New Testament Interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, says that *hyperbole* contains a bold exaggeration that cannot literally occur, but, on the other hand, *overstatement* is a bold exaggeration that can occur.[247] Is exaggeration or *overstatement* involved in the divorce sayings? A study of *overstatement* or *hyperbole* can assist us in a correct interpretation of many confusing Scriptures—especially Scriptures in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21-48). One of the divorce sayings (5:31-32) that Matthew records is found in this well-known Sermon. Some of the most startling uses of exaggeration are found in Jesus' Sermon. Through this practice of exaggeration, He captures the attention of His listeners and forcefully brings home His point.

Before analyzing the various pericopes concerning divorce, we need to read for ourselves the divorce sayings in the Synoptics (Matthew, Mark, and Luke).

Matthew 5:31-32

It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' [32] But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.

Matthew 19:1-9

When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. [2]Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there. [3] Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" [4]"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' [5]and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? [6] So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." [7] "Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her

[247]Robert H. Stein, *Difficult Sayings in the Gospels: Jesus' Use of Overstatement and Hyperbole* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 48-49.

away?" [8]Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. [9] I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery."

Mark 10:1-12

Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan. Again crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them. [2]Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" [3]"What did Moses command you?" he replied. [4] They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away." [5] "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied. [6]"But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' [7] 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, [8]and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one. [9]Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." [10]When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. [11]He answered, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. [12]And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery."

Luke 16:18

Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Having just read these Scriptures from Matthew, Mark, and Luke, how do we know that Jesus employed *exaggeration* or *overstatement* in His handling of the question of divorce? First, consider the two different narratives as reported by Mark and Luke.

Mark 10:11

He answered, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her."

Luke 16:18

Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Is there anything in these verses that jumps out at you? What is it that Jesus leaves out that He included in the Matthean accounts? Did Jesus include the "exemption" clause in Mark and Luke? No! It is not there. Neither writer chronicles the "exemption" clause. On the other hand, Matthew attaches the "exemption" clause. Why? Does this inclusion in Matthew suggest that he understood the words reported by Mark and Luke to be ***overstatement***? On the one hand, it appears that the words in Mark and Luke are absolute, no exemptions. But,

on the other hand, Matthew, with divine authority, interprets Jesus' words as forbidding divorce, but NOT in an absolute sense as reported by Mark and Luke.[248] For example, Matthew records, "But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery." Why are there differences in the various accounts?

Are there any other exceptions other than what Matthew mentioned? What about Paul's letter to Corinth in which he dealt with the subject of desertion on the part of the unbeliever (1 Corinthians 7:15). How did Paul deal with the issue of defection? Did Paul not know about Jesus' teachings as recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke? Did Paul understand Jesus' teaching about divorce as overstatement in order to stress the original intent of marriage? Just a cursory reading of Paul's first letter to Corinth reveals that he did not interpret the divorce sayings in the Synoptics as an absolute statement with no ramifications. When the unbeliever abandons the believer, Paul writes: "But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace" (1 Corinthians 7:15). '"Not bound' . . . almost certainly means free to marry," writes Stein.[249]

Does Paul contradict Jesus' teachings as reported by the synoptic writers? Did not Paul also write under the guidance of the Holy Spirit? Matthew inserts "fornication." Paul injects "desertion," but Mark and Luke do not mention any valid reasons for divorce. Do Mark and Luke contradict Matthew and Paul? How do we harmonize the differences in the various accounts of the divorce sayings? Perhaps the answer lies in the literary technique of exaggeration. We can safely conclude that Jesus employed *overstatement* and *hyperbole* in the Sermon on the Mount in order to highlight certain truths. Stein captures the usefulness of this literary technique in dealing with the subject of divorce. His comments about *exaggeration* in the divorce sayings are extremely helpful in unraveling the mystery that surrounds some of the most difficult teachings in Christendom. He writes,

> Exaggeration used for effect. . . . A second example is the "exception clause" in Jesus' teaching on divorce. We find the teaching in its absolute form in three instances and with the exception clause in two. . . . Although some would argue the reverse, most scholars believe that the unqualified form of the saying in Mark, Luke, and 1 Corinthians is closer to Jesus' actual words than are the Matthean versions with the exception clause. In the three non-Matthean versions we have a more authentic teaching of Jesus on divorce. . . . We have already established that Jesus made frequent use of exaggeration. Is it possible that his sayings on divorce are an exaggeration, and that Matthew introduces the exception clause to bring out its true meaning?[250]

A statement that conflicts with what is said elsewhere may contain exaggeration. For instance, in the Synoptics and Pauline writings, there are differences that exist in the divorce sayings. How do we account for the *apparent* contradictions? If we are to understand *apparent* contradictions, as opposed to *real* contradictions, we have to look at the totality of God's Word. We must seek to understand exaggeration in light of its context. An example of exaggeration is found in Jesus' statement concerning one's relatives: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). Did Jesus mean this literally? How do we harmonize Luke 14:26 with Mark 7:9-13? When the Pharisees and some of the teachers of the Law entered into direct conflict with Jesus, He questioned them about their disregard for the commandment about honoring father and mother. Listen to Mark as he narrates the events:

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[248]Did Jesus give the *exemption clause* in His confrontation with the religious leaders as recorded by Mark and Luke? Both Mark 10:1-12 and Matthew 19:1-9 chronicle the same sketch. How do we account for the discrepancy? Which of the two recordings are original? If Jesus gave the *exemption clause*, we wonder why Mark and Luke left out this phrase. Did Jesus later discuss this absolute statement, as reported by Mark and Luke, with His disciples? Did He discuss this subject of divorce at a later time with His disciples in the same way He did with them about the "leaven of the Pharisees" (Matthew 16:5-12)? Did He explain His divorce saying in greater detail? Or did Matthew understand from the beginning that exaggeration or *overstatement* was involved in this divorce saying?

[249]Robert H. Stein, *Difficult Passages in the Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 130.

[250]Robert H. Stein, *Difficult Sayings in the Gospels: Jesus' Use of Overstatement and Hyperbole*, 48-49.

> And he said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe[c] your own traditions! [10] For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother,'[d] and, 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.'[e] [11] But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban' (that is, a gift devoted to God), [12] then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. [13]Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that." (Mark 7: 9-13)

In Mark 7:9, Matthew informs the readers that Jesus rebukes the Pharisees and teachers of the Law for not honoring their fathers and mothers. There is an *apparent* contradiction, not a *real* contradiction between Luke 14:26 and Mark 7:9. On the one hand, one is told to hate father and mother, but, on the other hand, one is told to honor them. What is the answer to this dilemma? Hating parents is obviously an *overstatement*. What did Jesus seek to emphasize with such a bold statement in Luke 14:26? Was it not to put God first in one's life?

Another *apparent*, though not *real*, contradiction appears in Luke 6:27-36. In the Sermon on the Plain, Jesus addresses the attitude that His disciples should exemplify in their lives:

> But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, [28]bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. [29]If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. [30]Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. [31] Do to others as you would have them do to you. [32]If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. [33] And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. [34]And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full. [35] But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. [36]Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:27-36)

How do we reconcile Luke 6:27-36 with Luke 14:26 (see above citation)? We simply accept the statements in Luke 14:26 and Luke 6:27-36 as true and we must. On the surface, there is an *apparent* contradiction, even though not a *real* contradiction. Unless we accept one of these statements as *overstatement*, then, there is contradiction. By Jesus employing *overstatement* in Luke 14:26, He effectively brings home His intent—God is preeminent.

Another example of *overstatement* is found in Matthew 5:42. Jesus says: "Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you." Did Jesus intend for this Scripture to authorize an individual's demand for money without any discrimination on the part of the giver? How many are willing to follow this saying as an absolute statement that is binding on the person being asked? Are there no reservations in lending a helping hand? Have we ever turned away someone? If so, have we violated Jesus' command in Matthew 5:42? If you interpret this literally and not as *overstatement*, would you please send me your telephone number immediately—and I mean now! Do I sense hesitation? Isn't it strange how quickly we can see an *overstatement* in this command of Jesus when it concerns money?

What is Jesus seeking to emphasize with such a bold statement? Is He not going straight to the "jugular vein" of covetousness? Does Jesus want greed to die? It appears that Jesus desires us to share with those who are less fortunate than ourselves. James, our Lord's brother, also captures the essence of Jesus' words when he writes:

> What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? [15] Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. [16] If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? (James 2:14-16)

Again, it is necessary to compare Jesus' statement in Matthew 5:42 with Paul's statement to the Thessalonians. He forcefully writes:

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[c] Some manuscripts *set up*
[d] Exodus 20:12; Deut. 5:16
[e] Exodus 21:17; Lev. 20:9

> For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." [11] We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. [12] Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat. [13] And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right. [14] If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. [15] Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother. (2 Thessalonians 3:10-15)

Is there a contradiction between the words of Jesus and the words of Paul? On the surface there is an *apparent* contradiction, but not a *real* contradiction. Jesus captures the attention of His listeners and forcefully brings home God's distaste for covetousness. Jesus could have mentioned "exemptions" to His statement in Matthew 5:42, but this elaboration would have taken away from the focal point—namely, our tightfistedness.

Another example of exaggeration is Jesus' admonition about prayer: "But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you" (Matthew 6:6). Does Jesus forbid public prayers? Does not Jesus use *overstatement* to illustrate that praying is not to be done to be seen of men and women? Whatever work of righteousness we do must be performed to God's glory, not for self or for man or woman. We must never carry out good works to acquire praise from others. Jesus warns His disciples against pretentious works: "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven" (Matthew 6:1).

Yet, on the other hand, in this same Sermon, Jesus encourages the disciples to do good works: "Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:15-16). Here again there is an *apparent* contradiction, but not a *real* contradiction. Jesus uses *overstatement* to emphasize that performance of religious acts must come from the heart. In other words, Jesus is saying that personal prayer is not for display and neither are works for exhibition. Our acts of righteousness are matters between us and God.

Scripture abounds in the use of *overstatement* and *exaggeration* to underscore God's real intention. For instance, consider Jesus' use of *overstatement* to highlight the importance of eliminating sin from one's life:

> If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. [30]And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell. (Matthew 5:29-30)

Does Jesus teach that we must mutilate our bodies? This statement about mutilation of body parts is a classic example of *overstatement* in the teachings of Jesus. *Overstatemen*t and *hyperbole* abound in Jesus' teachings in the Synoptics. Is there a distinction between these two forms of exaggeration? Yes! An *overstatement* is an exaggeration that is literally <u>possible</u> but *hyperbole* is literally <u>impossible</u>. To illustrate this separation, consider the following words of Jesus: "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Matthew 19:24). Jesus employs *hyperbole* to press home a point. Although a camel cannot go through the "eye of a needle" (*hyperbole*), nevertheless, a rich man can be saved. The point of this *hyperbole* is to emphasize with the absurd the difficulty of a rich person being saved. On the other hand, Jesus uses *overstatement* to draw attention to a central point without drawing attention to exemptions, which would weaken His emphasis. We could literally gouge out ours eyes (*overstatement*), and we could literally cut off our hands (*overstatement*), but, on the other hand, a camel cannot go through the "eye of a needle" (*hyperbole*). *Hyperbole* and *overstatement* were employed as teaching techniques by Jesus to capture the attention of His listeners.

Overstatements in the Divorce Sayings

Overstatement is apparently the answer to the much debated divorce sayings in the Synoptics. Jesus frequently employs various methods to inculcate, or instill, His truths. The divorce sayings as reported by

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul may very well have included these procedures to stress the importance of the institution of marriage. By comparing all of the divorce sayings, we can safely conclude that Jesus uses exaggeration for calling attention to the original design of marriage. If we apply the same principles to the divorce sayings that we have applied to other sayings of Jesus, we can then arrive at a working postulate upon which to form a judgment about the propriety or impropriety of divorce and remarriage for reasons other than sexual immorality.

In our study of the divorce sayings, we can rule out *hyperbole*. Divorce is something we can do, that is to say, it is possible, not impossible. We can divorce with or without God's blessings. It appears that the words of Jesus are simply *overstatement*. A perusal of the divorce sayings in the Synoptics and Pauline writings reveals that the divorce accounts do not agree. Observe the following accounts:

> Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. [12]And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery. (Mark 10:11-12)

> Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. (Luke 16:18)

> But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery. (Matthew 5:32)

> I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery. (Matthew 19:9)

> But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. (1 Corinthians 7:15)

Neither Mark nor Luke takes notice of the "marital unfaithfulness" phrase as grounds for divorce. On the other hand, Matthew introduces the exemption clause ("marital unfaithfulness") twice. Then, in addition to the "marital unfaithfulness" clause, Paul adds "desertion" as an additional reason.[251] What does all of this mean? How can we harmonize *apparent* contradictions, not *real* contradictions—with the above citations? When we compare Scripture with Scripture, we can often learn whether a particular saying is an exaggeration or a specific command. The question might be asked, why would Jesus introduce exaggeration in the divorce sayings?

It appears that Jesus implements exaggeration to accentuate certain truths. Why is it that neither Mark nor Luke journaled the exemption clause? We wonder if the teachings of Jesus, as journaled by Mark and Luke, fall under *overstatement*. Since neither Mark nor Luke registers the exemption clause, is it possible that Jesus employs *overstatement*? Recognition of this teaching technique of exaggeration enables us to more accurately interpret the intent of the author. An awareness of exaggeration in the Scriptures will assist us in seeking biblical answers to the baffling question of divorce and remarriage that has plagued the church for centuries. It is obvious that there are no "pat" answers to this dilemma.

MERCY VERSUS LAW

The second aspect of this chapter deals with *mercy* taking precedence over *law*. Even if exaggeration (granted for the sake of argument) is not involved in the divorce sayings as advanced in the beginning of this chapter, nevertheless, there is still the principle of *mercy* over *law* coming into play. To illustrate this principle of *mercy* over *law*, a number of illustrations are presented to call attention to this vital concept of *mercy* taking precedence over *law* in dealing with the many problems individuals face in the marital relationship. Adultery or

[251]Does *marital unfaithfulness* include *desertion*? Does *marital unfaithfulness* include "wife-battering"? Is the word "fornication" more comprehensive in its total meaning than just *sexual immorality*?

fornication is not always the issue in the dissolution of the marriage bond. To illustrate this principle of *mercy* taking precedence over *law*, the story of David and the Bread of the Presence is analyzed.

David and the Bread of the Presence

How do David and the Bread of the Presence help us in understanding the divorce sayings in the Synoptics and Paul? Hopefully, an analysis of this episode will shed light from which we may draw principles upon which to base biblical decisions. Again, even if exaggeration is not found in the divorce sayings, we may consider *mercy* as another alternative to our dilemma in dealing with divorce. *Mercy* over *law* is another aspect we need to analyze in seeking an answer to the perplexing problems surrounding divorce and remarriage. To paint a picture about the righteousness of *mercy* taking preference over the righteousness of *law*, we only need to read about David and the twelve loaves of bread in the Holy Place.

Matthew records Jesus' reference to an incident that occurred in the days of Abiathar the high priest. Behind this scene lies the original statement respecting the eating of the sacred bread. Moses gave instructions concerning the "bread of the Presence"—it belonged only to Aaron and his sons, that is, only to the priests:

> Take fine flour and bake twelve loaves of bread, using two-tenths of an ephah[a] for each loaf. 6 Set them in two rows, six in each row, on the table of pure gold before the LORD. 7Along each row put some pure incense as a memorial portion to represent the bread and to be an offering made to the LORD by fire. 8This bread is to be set out before the LORD regularly, Sabbath after Sabbath, on behalf of the Israelites, as a lasting covenant. 9It belongs to Aaron and his sons, who are to eat it in a holy place, because it is a most holy part of their regular share of the offerings made to the LORD by fire. (Leviticus 24:5-9)

This consecrated bread was preserved only for the priests, no one else. Moses did not enter any "exemptions" to this rule. But we do read of an incident in the life of David where he and his men did eat of the consecrated bread because of hunger. This story is found in First Samuel:

> David went to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. Ahimelech trembled when he met him, and asked, "Why are you alone? Why is no one with you?" 2David answered Ahimelech the priest, "The king charged me with a certain matter and said to me, 'No one is to know anything about your mission and your instructions.' As for my men, I have told them to meet me at a certain place. 3Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever you can find." 4But the priest answered David, "I don't have any ordinary bread on hand; however, there is some consecrated bread here—provided the men have kept themselves from women." 5 David replied, "Indeed women have been kept from us, as usual whenever[a] I set out. The men's things[b] are holy even on missions that are not holy. How much more so today!" 6So the priest gave him the consecrated bread, since there was no bread there except the bread of the Presence that had been removed from before the LORD and replaced by hot bread on the day it was taken away. (1 Samuel 21:1-6)

Jesus uses this circumstance to explain by example the principle of *mercy* over *law*. Matthew cites the first face-to-face confrontation of the religious leaders with Jesus in Matthew 12. The Pharisees rebuked His disciples for picking some heads of grain on the Sabbath because they were hungry. Mark, as well as Luke, also tells about this showdown. We must consider carefully the parallel accounts of Jesus' encounter with the religious leaders in dealing with the subject of divorce and remarriage. We learn a great deal about *mercy* taking the lead over *law*. It appears that many Christians are as blind as were the Pharisees in this skirmish with Jesus over the *traditions of the elders*. The following are the three accounts of the David episode as reported by Matthew, Mark, and Luke:

> At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. 2When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath." 3 He answered, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry?

[a] That is, probably about 4 quarts (about 4.5 liters)
[a] Or *from us in the past few days since*
[b] Or *bodies*

[4]He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. [5]Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? [6]I tell you that one[a] greater than the temple is here. [7]If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,'[b] you would not have condemned the innocent. [8]For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." (Matthew 12:1-8)

One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. [24] The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" [25]He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? [26]In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions." [27]Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. [28]So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."
(Mark 2:23-28)

One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and his disciples began to pick some heads of grain, rub them in their hands and eat the kernels. [2]Some of the Pharisees asked, "Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" [3]Jesus answered them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? [4]He entered the house of God, and taking the consecrated bread, he ate what is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions." [5]Then Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." (Luke 6:1-5)

Jesus said that David and his men did that which "was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests" (Matthew 12:4; Mark 2:25-26; Luke 6:4). In other words, in today's parlance, it was "unscriptural," as we would say within many fellowships of God's people. In spite of this unlawfulness though, Jesus illustrates that it is always lawful to be humane and to save life. In other words, such compassionate acts are within the true "spirit of the law." Under normal circumstances, God would have condemned David for his disobedience to Moses' command, but because of the critical situation of need for food, compassion took supremacy over statute law.

Matthew also adds another detail, which neither Mark nor Luke records, concerning Jesus' confrontation with the religious leaders: "If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:7-8). In other words, Jesus is stressing mercy over the Sabbath. It is also significant that neither Matthew nor Luke adds: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). With this statement, Jesus highlights the priority of men and women over law. Jesus' forcefully sets forth the concept that men and women were not made for law, but rather, law was created for their benefit. Ordinarily, we would keep the Sabbath, but, on the other hand, there could be mitigating conditions in which mercy would take rank over the Sabbath. The implication is that we must understand that men and women were not brought into being to keep the Sabbath, but the Sabbath was conceived for their welfare. If in the keeping of the Sabbath, it would be detrimental to men and women, then, grace takes the lead over the Sabbath.

Principles Applied to Marriage Bond

Is this a principle that one could apply to the marriage bond when one finds himself or herself in an impossible situation? Was man or woman made for marriage? Or was marriage made for their benefit? It appears that the "tradition of the elders" is still alive and well on planet earth. Many still do not understand that men and women were not made for law, but law was made for their benefit (Mark 2:27). Many Christians, especially elders and preachers, still exercise the same kind of self-righteousness the Pharisees exhibited when they condemn the innocent party in a divorce when the offended person refuses to continue to live in an environment that is dangerous, risky, and hazardous to his or her well-being.[252] We must never forget that the

[a] Or *something*; also in verses 41 and 42

[b] Hosea 6:6

[252]The attitude of the religious leaders in this episode of adherence to the traditions of the elders reminds one of the self-righteousness the Pharisees exhibited on numerous occasions in their rebuke of Jesus.

Son of Man is Lord of the initial institution of marriage as well as Lord of the Sabbath. It is true that God intends one man and one woman for life. Nevertheless, God, because of sin, that is to say, hardness of the heart of men and women (Matthew 19:8), did give a safety valve (divorce) for an impossible situation (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

Jesus brought to the attention of the religious leaders the original intent of marriage. In the Garden of Eden, there was no need of a law concerning the marriage covenant, but after sin entered, God dealt with divorce because of the sinfulness of human beings (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). It is in this same vein that God dealt with murder. After Adam's and Eve's expulsion from their Edenic home, God issued instructions about those who took another person's life (Genesis 9:6). Prior to this expulsion, there was no need to address this issue—sin had not yet entered the world. Thus, in Deuteronomy, Moses records what the Lord revealed to him concerning the unthinkable conditions in marriage. Even when Moses says, "and he writes her a certificate of divorce" (Deuteronomy 24:1), it was still God's design that there be one man and one woman for life (Matthew 19:4-6).

Again, men and women were not made for marriage, but marriage was initiated for their happiness. The original purpose in marriage is still one man and one woman for life; but since sin entered the world, there may be mitigating situations in which *mercy* takes supremacy over God's initial meaning of the institution of marriage. In other words, God in his *mercy* makes provisions for the dissolution of marriages when the hardness of the heart prevails (Matthew 19:8; Deuteronomy 24:1-4).[253]

Thus far, *exaggeration* and *mercy* have been considered in seeking answers to the complexities encountered in the ending of the marriage bond. Can we exclude *exaggeration* and *mercy* as possible answers for our dilemma in a dangerous relationship? Is there another alternative for the dissolution of marriage when we are confronted with an absolute statement about divorce that does not set forth exemptions? What do we do with an absolute statement when no exemptions are made? Since the statements about marriage and divorce in both Mark and Luke are absolute, can we find relief from a hopeless situation in marriage? Before proceeding with an analysis of the absoluteness of the divorce sayings, it is in order to consider another graphic case of physical abuse.

CASE THREE**.** On December 12, 1988, Hedda Nussbaum appeared on the coversheet of *Newsweek.*[254] This is the story of two persons who lived together, but were not, as I understand it, married. Nevertheless, this case still serves as a vivid illustration of the predicament that women face in the real world of men. This scenario is still the same as countless women who are married can testify. If the two had been married, would she have had a valid reason to divorce her husband? Before one makes a decision, he or she should read the "rest of the story," as Paul Harvey would say. Ann Jones writes about Hedda Nussbaum's picture that appeared on the cover of Newsweek on December 12, 1988 following her arrest:

> There had been other "battered women" on the covers of other magazines—Ms. For one—pretty, posed models, delicately bruised with makeup in subtle tones of mauve and heliotrope, their eyes cast down in simulation of shame or sadness. But nothing like this. Hedda Nussbaum was the real thing. The photo was shot as she testified against her companion of twelve years, Joel Steinberg, who was charged with murder for beating to death the six-year-old girl the couple had illegally "adopted." (Hired as an attorney to place the child, Steinberg simply took her home.) Hedda Nussbaum's bruises had healed and the discolorations faded, but her face remained permanently scarred and misshapen, remodeled first by Joel Steinberg and subsequently by Dr. Monte Keen, plastic surgeon—the man-made face of America's most famous battered woman.[255]

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[253]Does Matthew 5:31-32 and Matthew 19:1-9 contradict Deuteronomy 24:1-4?

[254]See Ann Jones, *Next Time, She'll Be Dead: Battering & How to Stop It* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1994), 167-198, for detailed information about her torture from her companion of twelve years, Joel Steinberg. See also "Interview with Hedda Nussbaum with Larry King Live/ June 16, 2003" [ONLINE]. Available from http://www.rickross.com/reference/abusive/abusive1.html (accessed 25 July 2008). This report is a twenty-three page interview, which gives many details concerning circumstances surrounding this case. See also *The New York Times* [ONLINE]. Available from http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/n/hedda_nussbaum/index.html (accessed 25 July 2008).

[255] *Next Time, She'll Be Dead*, 167.

I remember my first impression about this story. I thought she and her husband ought to be put to death, but, I made judgments without knowing the full story. "That face made some people weep. It made others want to destroy her, especially women. Put her on trial, they said. Lock her up. Get rid of her. Just look at what she let him do to her. Look at what she let him do to her child," writes Jones.[256] After the jury heard only the part that the judge would allow—not the whole story of abuse—they emerged from the jury room on January 30th with a verdict—Not Guilty of murder—but Guilty of manslaughter in the first degree.

Jones reports that at the time Hedda Nussbaum met Joel Steinberg, "She was thirty-two, good-looking, a rising editor of children's books at Random House, and he was thirty-three, good-looking, a lawyer, and (like Nussbaum) Jewish."[257] This is a description of Nussbaum when she met Steinberg in 1975.[258] When she was arrested on November 2, 1987, a doctor from the New York University Medical Center, who examined her from head to toe on November 3, 1987, described the forty-five year old woman to the jury as

> anemic, debilitated, malnourished, wasted, limping, and hunch-backed from osteoporosis. He found "old and new lacerations on her scalp, chunks of hair torn out from the right side of her head, an old ulceration and a new fracture on her nose, a black eye, lacerated upper lip, three- or four-month old fractures on both cheekbones, a scar on the abdomen, bruises on the abdomen and back, eight fractured right ribs, seven fractured left ribs, a very large new bruise on the right hip with many scarred areas around it, old abrasion on the left leg, and two deep, three-inch-wide ulcers on the right leg, which was infected, partly gangrenous, and red and swollen from foot to knee." The ulcerated lesions on Nussbaum's lower right leg were 'potentially fatal' injuries, the doctor said, which if untreated "could have led to blood poisoning and cardiovascular collapse."[259]

Jimmy Breslin wrote in *Newsday*, "She looked as if she had just fought Fritzie Zivic in Pittsburgh. Fritzie used to get his thumb into an eye and turn it like he was dialing a phone number."[260] Again, Jones says that Paul Hamill of the *New York Post was* "most shocked by the nose." He also wrote, "This is the nose of an old pug, some club-fighting veteran of the St. Nicholas Arena or Eastern Parkway, battered and hurt and healed and hurt again, until it is no longer the nose worn when young."[261] The prosecutor Peter Casolaro wanted Nussbaum to tell the jury about some of Steinberg's assault, but Judge Harold Rothwax decided that the jury could not hear about his history of abuse for fear that that knowledge would inflame the jury. Prior to Nussbaum's testimony, Casolaro outlined thirty-two incidents of assaults. The newspapers printed summaries. The following is a list of atrocities taken from *Newday's* "Catalog of Abuse," cited in Jones:

1. March 17, 1978. The first time Steinberg struck Nussbaum, hitting her in the eye with an open hand. She required hospital treatment. Admitted into evidence.
2. In 1978. Steinberg gave Nussbaum at least ten black eyes.
3. Feb. 4, 1981. Steinberg ruptured Nussbaum's spleen in a beating. She had to go to St. Vincent's Hospital to have it removed. Admitted into evidence.
4. In 1982. Steinberg beat Nussbaum and she sought treatment at St. Vincent's for broken ribs.
5. In 1983. Steinberg used a broomstick to beat her on the feet, causing injury and scars.
6. Late 1983 through 1984. Steinberg beat her severely and repeatedly during this period. Her face was disfigured, her nose broken, and her ear cauliflowered. Steinberg restricted her movements, presumably so her injuries would not be noticed. Once, when she phoned her father for help, Steinberg threw her down. This point admitted into evidence. Feb. 11, 1984. Her knee was broken in a beating and she limped to Bellevue Hospital for treatment. April 14, 1984. She was beaten and ran away.
7. In 1984. Steinberg kicked Nussbaum in the eye, producing serious injury.
8. In 1984. Steinberg hit Nussbaum in the eye, leaving her with a swollen eye.
9. In 1984. Steinberg beat Nussbaum after she refused to take a cold bath and then threw her into the bath with her clothes on. She ran away.
10. In 1984. Steinberg choked Nussbaum, damaging her vocal cords.

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[256] Ibid., 168.
[257] Ibid., 182.
[258] Ibid.
[259] Ibid., 168-169.
[260] Ibid.
[261] Ibid.

11. August 1984. Steinberg gave Nussbaum a black eye. She lost her job with Random House while staying home to recuperate. Admitted into evidence.
12. Late 1984 to early 1985. Steinberg used a blowtorch used for freebasing to burn Nussbaum, leaving scars.
13. Late 1984. Steinberg took a bath with Nussbaum and then beat her "brutally."
14. Late 1984. Steinberg used a broomstick handle to beat her hands, leaving them permanently injured.
15. In 1985. Steinberg used a stick to beat Nussbaum's sexual organs, causing them to swell for several months. In a subsequent beating, she hemorrhaged.
16. In 1985. Steinberg urinated on Nussbaum twice after throwing her to the floor.
17. Same as number 16.
18. September 1985. Steinberg handcuffed Nussbaum in the bathroom and forced her to sleep there.
19. In 1985. Steinberg handcuffed Nussbaum to a chinning bar in the bedroom and told her to sleep there.
20. In 1985. Steinberg struck Nussbaum, chipping or knocking out teeth.
21. Late 1985 to early 1986. Steinberg knocked her down and she cut her wrist by falling against a filing cabinet, causing injury and scarring.
22. In 1986. Steinberg hit Nussbaum, knocking out more teeth.
23. In 1986. Steinberg beat up Nussbaum in a car on the way to visit his mother.
24. In 1986. Steinberg hit her head against a wall, causing her to bleed.
25. Late 1986 through 1987. Steinberg beat Nussbaum repeatedly with a metal exercise bar, especially during the two months before Lisa Steinberg's death on Nov. 5, 1987. Admitted into evidence.
26. In 1987. Steinberg struck Nussbaum with his open hand, splitting her lip repeatedly.
27. In 1987. Steinberg broke her nose again in a beating.
28. October 1987. Steinberg grabbed her by one ankle and one wrist and bounced her on the floor, severely bruising her buttocks.
29. Late 1987. When Nussbaum refused to take a cold bath, Steinberg threw her into the bathtub with her clothes on.
30. In 1987. Steinberg pulled her hair out numerous times.
31. October 1987. Steinberg repeatedly poked his fingers in Nussbaum's eyes, lacerating her nose once.
32. During the last nine years the couple lived together the physical abuse continued with regularity, a persistent tool used ... to control Miss Nussbaum, or ... to break her will.[262]

Only four of the thirty-two barbarities committed against her were admitted into evidence during the trial. He received a sentence of 8 1/3 to 25 years for killing the child Lisa—no punishment for what he did to Miss Hedda Nussbaum.[263] One additional report of this case is given to make individuals aware of the problems that many individuals face in the "ends and outs" of everyday life. Ronald Sullivan wrote in The Metropolitan News the following account of the atrocities committed against Miss Nussbaum:

- At the direction of a female detective, Ms. Nussbaum, dressed in a dark turtleneck sweater and blue jeans, displayed her injuries to the camera, pulling up her sweater and pulling down her pants in the process. As one juror winced at the sight and others shook their heads in disbelief, the tape showed massive cuts and bruises and evidence of other injuries all over Ms. Nussbaum's body. For example, a dark bruise the size of a saucer was on her right buttock. Her right wrist was deformed, where a broken bone had healed incorrectly. Deep green ulcerations covered the length of her right leg. The condition of that leg caused one juror to gasp in shock.
- Earlier two prosecution witnesses told the jury that Ms. Nussbaum appeared to have just suffered a savage beating when detectives and a child-abuse worker tried to question her and Mr. Steinberg about Lisa's injuries. "Her nose was caved in; her face was swollen; she was a mass of black-and-blue marks," said Joseph Petrizzo, a child-abuse caseworker in the New York City Bureau of Special Services for Children.
- "She had a broken nose, blackened eyes, a split lip, and big clumps of her hair were missing," said Robert Columbia, a police detective assigned to sex crimes and child-abuse cases. "She was limping and she looked dazed and confused."
- Charges of murder against Ms. Nussbaum have been dismissed on the ground that she was so beaten she was incapable of saving Lisa from death (their daughter). Ms. Nussbaum is expected to be the main prosecution witness.[264]

What reaction should we exercise toward those who find themselves in an impossible situation of such cruelty? Do we say, "Adultery not involved, still bound for life"? The response of many preachers and elders today is the height of "legalism." It is on par with the religious leaders of Jesus' day, perhaps even worse. The

[262] Ibid., 170-173.
[263] Ibid., 197.
[264] Ronald Sullivan, "Jurors See Graphic Tape of Nussbaum," *Metropolitan News* 4 November 1988, 1 (B) and 6 (B).

"letter of the law" is the battle cry of many, no mercy—just law. Let God's people turn once more to Holy Scripture for a biblical solution. A biblical example should help us in seeking a biblical solution to such a baffling problem for many Christians.

The case of David and the "Bread of the Presence," as discussed above, is worthy of recall in analyzing the above scenario of physical abuse. This example still provides an excellent illustration of "absolute statement" when dealing with extenuating circumstances that allows for *mercy* to take superiority over *law*. We find an absolute statement concerning the eating of consecrated bread with no mention of exemptions. The Law is absolute, no mention of exemptions. But when Jesus called forth this case in His dealing with the religious leaders, we quickly observe that Jesus indicates that David was without guilt: "If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent" (Matthew 12:7). Jesus informed the religious leaders that because of extenuating circumstances surrounding David's predicament that God overrode *law* with *mercy* (A principle that many of our religious leaders have not yet learned.).

Although there are absolute statements[265] concerning the dissolution of marriage, does this fact indicate, in and of itself, that there cannot be exemption from the marriage bond for any reason other than sexual immorality? Does an absolute statement about divorce and remarriage exclude one from divorcing his or her spouse for abuse, child abuse, murder, robbery, fornication, or adultery? Does the innocent party have any recourse for the wickedness of a husband or wife?

Many wives and husbands have been poisoned, brutally beaten, stabbed—even to the point of paralysis or death—and others shot or killed. Is it God's design in marriage to have a woman or a man to live with a monster or maniac simply because he or she did not engage in sexual relations outside the marriage bond? Many would say yes, but, in spite of the consensus of many, we should still analyze any absolute statement in its *intended application*. If God did not legislate specifically concerning the above issues, then one should rely upon principles set forth in the Scriptures to make a valid judgment concerning divorce for other reasons *than sexual immorality*.

Legalistic Approach to This Dilemma

It is not uncommon for Christians to treat the Scriptures with the same legality that the religious leaders did in the days of Jesus. Just as the Pharisees used their Scriptures in an illegal manner to uphold their traditions, many Christians, unconsciously, do the same in their exposition of the divorce sayings. We should again reflect upon the confrontation of Jesus with the Pharisees in Matthew 12:1-12, in which Jesus reminds the Pharisees that David and his companions violated God's Law, but were not condemned.

Why were they not doomed? Well, Jesus informs the religious leaders that there may be extenuating circumstances in which mercy takes precedence over Law. In this encounter, Jesus also calls attention to the principle of mercy over Law by reminding them of the Sabbath. Jesus penetrates their façade of hypocrisy by saying, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). In other words, Jesus says that under the normal state of affairs, one would adhere to the Sabbath regulations, but there may be controlling factors in which mercy takes supremacy over Law.

The relationship between the Old Testament incident of David (1 Samuel 21:1-6) and the *apparent* infringement of the Sabbath day by the disciples lies in the fact that on both occasions godly men did something forbidden—one by God, the other by man (traditions of the elders). Since, however, it is always "lawful" to do good and to save life (even on the Sabbath), both David and the disciples were within the "spirit" of the Law (see Isaiah 58:6-7; Luke 6:6-11; 13:10-17; 14:1-6). The same reasoning may be applied to other commands from God—including marriage and divorce. Neither man nor woman was made for the "marriage law," but the

[265]An analysis of the divorce sayings appears to be ***overstatement*** rather than absolute statements. But for the sake of argument, should one advance the concept that the divorce sayings in Mark and Luke are not ***overstatements***, then, one must deal with the concept of absolutes. Does an absolute statement about divorce forbid the dissolution of marriage under certain circumstances?

"marriage law" was made for their welfare. Again, there may be mitigating circumstances in which mercy takes level standing over law. Larry Richard's statement about the principles of mercy is to the point:

> David's need was seen by God as more important than the law's regulation. And the priest's service to Israel was, of course, more important than the Sabbath prohibition against work. In each case a principle of mercy—of deep concern for human need—took precedence over what was technically a violation of the law. David and the priests broke the law but were adjudged innocent.
>
> Isn't it possible that those who suffer the tragedy of divorce and who remarry do commit adultery, as David committed sacrilege, and yet are adjudged innocent? Doesn't the law's provision of divorce and its expectation of remarriage suggest that God can and does deal with divorce and remarriage with a mercy quite unlike the attitude of ancient and modern Pharisees who are preoccupied with legalities...? It is here (Matthew 19) that Jesus points out that divorce was permitted because human hearts are hard, not because God desires divorce. Divorce was an expression of God's mercy, not an affirmation of his ideal will.[266]

SCENARIO OF JESUS AND THE PHARISEES

What are we to do with *apparent* contradictory statements existing in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul? To understand the teachings of Jesus on this subject, we must consider the scenario of Jesus' confrontation with the Pharisees. First, Matthew informs his readers that the religious leaders came to Jesus when He entered the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. Second, the Pharisees asked questions about divorce, not because they wanted to know what God had said, but rather to test Him: "Some Pharisees," writes Matthew, "came to him to test him" (Matthew 19:3).

Jesus, upon being asked His view—"Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife'" (Mark 10:2)—realized that the whole debate was focusing upon speculations about when the divine plan for marriage can be ignored. Jesus, out of regard for the basic plan and purpose of God in marriage, replied abruptly, "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law" (Mark 10:5). In so responding to the Jewish leaders, Jesus is not concerned with hypothetical situations or exemptions. Rather, He is solicitous for the ideal design of God—one man and one woman for life (Mark 10:6-8).

In answer to the Pharisees' question about divorce, Jesus could have said, "It is written" (Matthew 4:4), and then cited the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. But in this confrontation, He did not exegete God's words on divorce to Moses, but rather, He took them back to the original institution of marriage before the fall (Genesis 1-3). A parallel to this marital legislation is the law concerning murder. After the "fall" in the Garden of Eden, God dealt with murder; God issued a death warrant for all those guilty of murder: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man" (Genesis 9:6). There was no reason for God to legislate concerning divorce and murder prior to the fall. But because of sin, God had to enact legislation to protect the innocent (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

Jesus did not seek to lay down a legal pronouncement to cover every hypothetical crisis in the lives of men and women. To teach that He did is to read more into the text than Jesus himself taught. How does one know this? First, it is significant that Mark and Luke leave out the "exemption clause" (Mark 10:10; Luke 16:18). On the other hand, Matthew includes this controversial clause in the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus' battle with the Jewish leaders (Matthew 5:32; 19:9). Then, Paul, in his first letter to Corinth, sets forth "desertion" by the unbeliever as another "exemption clause" (1 Corinthians 7:15). Did he contradict the teachings of Jesus in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9? Did he contradict Mark 10:10 and Luke 16:18? Did he understand that Jesus was not giving a dissertation on marriage and divorce? Did he understand *overstatement* and *hyperbole* in the teachings of Jesus? Listen to Paul's advice about desertion: "But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace" (1 Corinthians 7:15). Would this principle also apply in wife battering? If not, why not?

[266]Lawrence O. Richards, *Expository Dictionary of the Bible Words* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 234-35.

Peace in the Messianic Age

In summary, the "divorce sayings" must be interpreted in light of their context and their intended meanings. It is not sufficient simply to quote a passage of Scripture and say this is what the Bible says. Very often the Bible does not mean what it says literally, that is, it may say one thing, but mean something else. To illustrate this principle, it is necessary to look at familiar passages in the book of Isaiah (11:6-9; 35:8-11) to highlight this proposition. We quickly observe that these two citations from Isaiah conflict with each other if interpreted literally.

Isaiah 11:6-9	Isaiah 35:8-10
The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. 7The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. 8The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. 9They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.	And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it. 9 No lion will be there, nor will any ferocious beast get up on it; they will not be found there. But only the redeemed will walk there, 10and the ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; Everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

A common interpretation of Isaiah 11:6-9 is that in the millenium kingdom, carnivorous animals will be transformed into herbivorous animals. But it is better to see this pericope (section) of Scripture as an exaggerated picture of the happiness and serenity of the coming messianic age. Isaiah describes, in very picturesque language, the animals of the wild as living together with the more gentle animals. In one passage, the "lion" is there, yet, on the other hand, the passage in Isaiah 35:8-10 excludes nonpeaceful animals in the picture of bliss and peace. Both passages, though literally contradictory, call forth different analogies to express the same reality, that is to say, peace in the coming messianic age.

Swallowing Camels

In Matthew 23:24, Jesus says, "You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel." Observe that Jesus says that the religious leaders swallowed a camel. The question is, did they? We must be careful to distinguish between the *words* of Jesus and the *meaning* Jesus intended to convey to His listeners. In most instances, the *words* and their *meanings* are the same, that is, a literal fulfillment is meant. In "You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel," the *words* and their *meanings* are not the same. For one to take these words literally would be to lose sight of the meaning Jesus intended these expressions to communicate. Through the use of *hyperbole*, Jesus effectively heightened the effective nature of His thoughts. The purpose of exaggerated language is to create a greater impression and to stir His hearers to reflect more closely upon the reality of their hypocritical actions and to consider more firmly His teachings.

Sawdust in the Eyes

Through exaggeration, Jesus is able to create a picture that is unforgettable. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?" Who can forget the figures of "sawdust" in one's eye and a "plank" in another eye. Who can forget the words of Jesus, "Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Matthew 19:24). Such pictures are long remembered. Jesus employed bold language to impress upon the hearer the seriousness of what He was telling them.

Peace on Earth

Another example of exaggeration is found in Jesus' announcement: "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34). How do we harmonize this pronouncement with other statements in Matthew, Mark and Luke? For instance, consider the following:

> Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. (Matthew 5:9)
>
> He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering." (Mark 5:34)
>
> As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it [42] and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes." (Luke 19:41-42)
>
> Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, [14]"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." (Luke 2:13-14)

If we interpret "I did not come to bring peace" literally, then, this contradicts Mark's and Luke's "peace" sayings. Also, a literal interpretation would not harmonize with Paul's letter to Rome: "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). The context is the determining factor for Matthew 10:34. This sword did not have anything to do with politics or military action. Jesus employed the term "sword" as a metaphorical description of the division that faith in Christ often brings about; namely, the dissolution of the family unit when one member of the family becomes a Christian.

Praying in the Closet

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught His disciples to pray secretly: "But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen" (Matthew 6:6). Is this command to be interpreted literally? Is this not *overstatement*? Can one pray in public, even though this command tells one to "close the door and pray"? Jesus did not always pray in His closet.

> After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray. (Mark 6:46)
>
> One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. (Luke 6:24)
>
> About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. (Luke 9:28)

Children were also brought to Jesus for prayers:

> Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them. [14] Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." [15]When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there. (Matthew 19:13-15)

Neither Luke nor Mark mentions the prayers, but they do allude to Jesus' touching the children. No doubt He also prayed for and blessed the children.

Swearing

Another fine example of *overstatement* is Jesus' teaching on swearing. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says,

> Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' [34]But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; [35]or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. [36]And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. [37] Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one. (Matthew 5:33-37)

Is this an absolute prohibition against swearing? Can Christians swear in court? Can a Christian swear when taking his or her driver's license? The Sermon on the Mount abounds with *overstatement*. On another occasion Jesus did not forbid total refrain from swearing. In His confrontation with the Pharisees, Jesus says,

> Woe to you, blind guides! You say, "If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath." [17]You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? [18] You also say, "If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath." [19]You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? [20]Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. [21]And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. [22]And he who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it. (Matthew 23:16-22)

In this scenario, Jesus condemns the view of the religious leaders in their willingness to swear by the temple or the altar as nothing. On the other hand, if they swore by the gold of the temple or the gift that they offered on the altar, then, the oath is binding. It is also worthy of observation that Jesus did not refuse to be placed under oath. To begin with, Jesus remained silent; but the high priest said, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God" (Matthew 26:63). Then Jesus no longer remained silent: "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matthew 26:64). Jesus responds in compliance with the Law: "If a person sins because he does not speak up when he hears a public charge to testify regarding something he has seen or learned about, he will be held responsible" (Leviticus 5:1).

Hating Parents

How do we determine if a statement or saying is *hyperbole* or *overstatement*? The study of parallel passages often sheds light in helping to determine exaggeration. It is apparent that the Gospel writers were not always concerned with the *ipsissima verba*, or the very words. We cannot always be sure that the Evangelist sought to convey the exact wording of Jesus' sayings. A good example is found in Luke 14:26 and its parallel in Matthew 10:37.

Luke 14:26	Matthew 10:37
If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple.	Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

Through Matthew's account, we are able to observe that Jesus' bidding to hate one's family, as recorded in Luke 14:26, was not meant to be taken literally but was an *overstatement* used for effectiveness. In this hate relationship, Jesus employs exaggeration to highlight the superiority of faithfulness to God over faithfulness to family ties, as is evident from the fact that Jesus' statement conflicts with His other clear statements about loving one's parents or enemies. We should compare the following accounts in order to see that an interpretation that requires a wooden literalness involves contradictions:

> And he said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe[c] your own traditions! [10]For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother,'[d] and, 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.'[e] [11]But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban' (that is, a gift devoted to God), [12]then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. [13]Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that." (Mark 7:9-13)

> You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.' (Mark 10:19)

> But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. (Luke 6:27)

Yes, Jesus must be exaggerating in Luke 14:26. Jesus employed *overstatement* in His encouraging His disciples to submit to the teachings of the Pharisees (Matthew 23:2-3). This statement conflicts with His teachings in Matthew 16:6; 16:11-12. On the surface there appears to be a *real* contradiction. But the contradiction is not *real* but only *apparent*.

Matthew 23:2-3	Matthew 16:6, 11-12
The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. [3]So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.	"Be careful," Jesus said to them. "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." How is it you don't understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees. [12]Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

When we seek to find in both passages an absolute reference to every single teaching of the Pharisees, do we find an unresolvable problem? In general, the teachings of Jesus were similar to that of the religious leaders. On the other hand, Jesus objected strenuously to the oral traditions of Pharisees and Scribes. Matthew writes:

> The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and [2]saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were "unclean," that is, unwashed. [3](The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. [4]When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups,

[c] Some manuscripts *set up*
[d] Exodus 20:12; Deut. 5:16
[e] Exodus 21:17; Lev. 20:9

pitchers and kettles.[a]) [5] So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with 'unclean' hands?" [6] He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. [7]They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.'[b] [8] You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men." [9] And he said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe[c] your own traditions! [10]For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother,'[d] and, 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.'[e] [11]But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban' (that is, a gift devoted to God), [12]then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. [13]Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that." (Mark 7:1-13)

It is apparent that it is best to look upon these citations from Scripture as statements containing exaggeration to draw attention to certain aspects of the Pharisees' doctrines and practices—not a blanket endorsement or condemnation.

CONCLUSION

Since this chapter is about the *divorce sayings* in the Synoptics and Pauline accounts, it seems appropriate, once more, in concluding this study, to draw attention again to the "exception clause" in Jesus' teaching on divorce. One finds the teaching of divorce in its absolute form in three instances and also with the exception clause in three—two by Jesus, one by Paul. The following charts set forth the "absolute forms" as well as the "exception forms":

ABSOLUTE FORM	ABSOLUTE FORM	ABSOLUTE FORM
Mark 10:11	Luke 16:18	1 Corinthians 7:10-11
He answered, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her."	Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.	To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. [11] But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.
EXECPTION FORM	**EXECPTION FORM**	**EXECPTION FORM**
Matthew 5:32	Matthew 19:9	1 Corinthians 7:15
But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and	I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.	But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to

[a] Some early manuscripts *pitchers, kettles and dining couches*
[b] Isaiah 29:13
[c] Some manuscripts *set up*
[d] Exodus 20:12; Deut. 5:16
[e] Exodus 21:17; Lev. 20:9

anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.	live in peace.

As stated above, Jesus accuses the religious leaders of straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel (Matthew 23:24). Jesus says they swallowed a camel, period! The question is, did they? We must be careful to distinguish between the *words* of Jesus and the *meaning* Jesus intended to convey. In most instances, the "words" and their "meanings" are the same, that is, a literal fulfillment is meant. But in "You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel," the "words" and their "meanings" are not synonymous. For us to take these words literally would be to lose sight of the meaning Jesus intended these words to convey.

To take words in Mark (10:10) and Luke (16:18) literally would be to lose sight of their designed purpose. To take all the assertions of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount literally would be to lose sight of His contemplated aim. The language Jesus uses in His teaching is not an end—in and of itself—but an instrument by which He seeks to convey what He means. Should we say that one must not interpret the Bible literally? The answer is *yes* and *no*. Is this a catch twenty-two question? Dammed if you say *yes* and dammed if you say *no*! Stein correctly says, "The answer to this question is that we are to take the meaning of the Bible literally."[267] In other words, the *meaning* of the words and not simply the *words* themselves is to be considered in our interpretation. We, for example, may quote what the Bible says and not necessarily give the intended meaning.[268] The literal interpretation of many Scriptures would result in nonsense.

We should stop playing God with the lives of men and women. Many believers occupy the "throne of God" in their condemnation of those who do not concur with their particular brand of orthodoxy, or prevailing attitude. Some decisions have to be left up to the individual. Paul goes right to the very heart of the matter when he writes, "Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand" (Romans 14:4). As we conclude, the problem of divorce and remarriage is not an easy question to deal with. When someone finds himself or herself involved with a spouse who is guilty of some "unclean thing" (Deuteronomy 24:1-4; Matthew 5:32; 19:9; 1 Corinthians 7:15), we must exercise judgment based upon biblical principles. I wish to present one more case concerning mercy taking precedence, or priority, over law.

CASE FOUR. This chapter concludes with one additional scenario in which sexual immorality was not involved. After you read the story, please answer the question, is this young lady bound to her husband until he commits "fornication"? Does the principle of *mercy* take precedence over *law*? On June 24, 1981, the Montgomery Advertiser published the following article:

Woman struck by vehicle

A 19-year-old woman was struck by a motor vehicle on the Atlanta Highway Tuesday night and badly injured, according to police. The vehicle left the scene of the accident with the woman lying in the southbound turn lane near Fox Hollow Road, said Sgt. W.H. Pertree. Police learned of the accident when "somebody stopped" a patrol car "and told them somebody had been hit," Lt. B.J. Cleveland said. Police did not release the name of the woman Tuesday night. A St. Margaret's Hospital spokesman said the woman was in critical condition. The accident occurred at about 9:20. Cpl. Leion Sims said there were five or six people who saw the woman walking before she was struck, but "nobody we've come up with actually saw her get hit by the car." Doctors told Sims the woman was responding to treatment, although she was still unconscious at 12:30 a.m. Wednesday. Police hope to question her Wednesday morning.[269]

Well, what does the above article have to do with "wife battering"? Is this not a story about a "hit and run" accident? This article does not tell the whole story. The next day another article appeared that revealed the whole sordid story of wife abuse. She was brutally beaten by her husband. A few years after this inhuman treatment by her husband, I talked with this young woman and obtained photocopies of her ordeal in the

[267]Robert H. Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus' Teachings* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 11.

[268]For further details concerning this concept of just simply quoting a biblical passage without regard to context, see Dallas Burdette, "Bible Speaking" in *Ensign* 18, no. 5 (May 1990).

[269]"Woman struck by vehicle," in *Montgomery Advertiser* 24 June 1981. (I do not have the author's name or page number.)

hospital. The pictures taken by the police at the time of the accident (actually, wife beating) reveal a tremendous loss of blood. In fact, after viewing the pictures, I wondered how one could have lost so much blood and still lived. After you read the story, ask yourself this question, should she have gone back to her husband? If she leaves, is she still bound to him for the rest of her life since he did not commit adultery—he just tried to kill her? If she leaves, is she biblically bound to live a celibate life since he did not commit a sexual sin? The crime scene was horrendous; the blood in the pictures covered the length and breath of her body; she looked as if she had been in a tornado. Are you ready for the rest of the story? On June 25, 1981, the following article appeared:

City Woman Badly Beaten

> A 19-year-old woman, originally thought to be a victim of a hit-and-run accident, was the victim of a severe beating, police said today. Sandra Ann Cooper, 135 Turner Place, was found lying in the southbound lane of the 5100 block of the Atlanta Highway about 9:30 p.m. Tuesday, according to police reports. Ms. Cooper was in stable condition in St. Margaret's Hospital's intensive care until this morning, a hospital spokesman said. Sgt. H.C. Norton said the young woman was improving, but doctors said she was not coherent enough to talk to police. According to police reports, Ms. Cooper was struck several times on the head with a blunt object. She also suffered wounds to the left [should be to the right—RDB], reports shows. Police found the woman after a man stopped a patrol car and said "somebody had been hit," Norton said. Norton said police originally though she had been injured after being struck by a motor vehicle.[270]

As we reflect upon this inhumane treatment by the husband, what is your reaction? Is she bound in marriage to this man for the rest of her life simply because he did not have sexual relations with another woman? Is this a case in which the principle of mercy takes precedence over law? Do we react against divorce as an alternative to be released from a tyrant? Is our position the same as the Pharisees that Jesus encountered? Just how do we interpret the divorce sayings in the Synoptic and Pauline accounts? Would Jesus rebuke us today for our uncompromising attitude of wooden literalness in our interpretation of the divorce sayings? Are hyperboles or exaggerations or overstatements an important element in the teachings of Jesus? God help each of us to make the right choice with love and mercy as the guiding star.

The next chapter ("Judge Not") focuses upon Jesus' statement in the Sermon on the Mount concerning censorious, or hyper-critical, judgment. Chapter 9 is appropriate to nip-in-the-bud the kind of judgment that seeks to castigate believers who do not conform to the status quo of certain religious fellowships. God does not forbid judgment, but our judgment must be a judgment that is righteous. A censorious, or contemptuous, kind of judgment blocks the unity for which our Lord Jesus prayed. In the earlier chapters of this book, I have endeavored to exercise the spirit of toleration. Even though I deal with critical issues that cause divisions among God's people, I still do not question one's devotion and sincerity.

[270]"City Woman Badly Beaten," in *Montgomery Advertiser* 25 June 1981**.** (I do not have the author's name or page number.)

9

Judge Not

> We set out as a basic rule the premise that *a text cannot mean what it never could have meant to its author or his readers*. This is why exegesis must always come first. It is especially important that we repeat this premise here, for this at least establishes some parameters of meaning. This rule does not always help find out what a text *means*, but it does help to set limits as to what it cannot mean.[271]

Does Jesus forbid judging individuals in Matthew 7:1? Jesus' words about judging are favorite words of many individuals—and they should be. This judging is set forth in negative terms by our Lord: "Do not judge, or you too, will be judged." Alternatively, this command from Jesus is frequently violated by many sincere believers when they pass judgment on other believers who do not accept many of their odd interpretations of Scripture. One objective of this chapter is to analyze both the positive (righteous judgment) and negative (unrighteous judgment) implications drawn from this frequently cited text. It is not wrong to make judgments, but Jesus, in this passage, is speaking of judgment that is hypercritical judgment—a judgment that deals with external versus internal righteousness. Unconsciously, many believers violate this clear passage in their judgment of other sincere believers who do not belong to their particular community of orthodoxy.

Again, on the negative side, Christians frequently transgress this command of Jesus in their castigation of faithful children of God who refuse to kow-tow to the dictates of certain religious leaders, that is, leaders who espouse a particular interpretation of an isolated Scripture from its context. Justification for disobedience or setting aside of Matthew 7:1 is based upon two other Scriptures in this same chapter, namely, verses 6 and 15. These two Scriptures are called upon to bolster claims for chastisement over doctrinal issues, which doctrines are made a test of one's recognition into the local fellowship. How do we reconcile these two apparent contradictions?

In seeking an answer, we should focus upon the meaning of 7:1 in its intended meaning. "Judge Not" flashes like neon lights upon the minds of men and women when they do not want someone judging their ethical behavior. Georg Strecker, professor of New Testament at Georg August University, Gottingen, West Germany, explains the words this way: "The absolute prohibition of judging (**κρίνειν** [*krinein*]) leaves no room for harmonization attempts."[272] Is it biblical to pass judgment on other individuals?

What did Jesus intend to convey with this pronouncement? Does He prevent all judgment? Is there an evil judgment? Is there a righteous judgment? What is this judgment that Jesus speaks of in Matthew 7:1? Do we breach this text when we judge according to one's external or internal motivation for his or her acts of righteousness? Do we abuse Jesus' command when we judge others who do not see eye-to-eye with us in our interpretation of God's Word? If we wish a biblical answer to the apparent dilemma—not a real dilemma—we must consult the context to determine the kind of judgment that Jesus forbids. Otherwise, we will defy the intended meaning of Jesus' famous saying. Once more, Georg Strecker (1929-1994) has made the point clear:

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[271]Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 60.

[272]Georg Strecker, *The Sermon on the Mount: An Exegetical Commentary*, trans. O. C. Dean, Jr. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 143.

> The followers of Jesus, who are sworn to the commandment of love (cf. 5:38-48; 22:34-40), are forbidden any kind of judgment-passing that reduces one's neighbor to an object of one's own interest. For them, judging is precluded as an attitude that is identical with lovelessness.[273]

In the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord warns His people about judging others: "Do not judge, or you too will be judged" (Matthew 7:1). After World War II, Helmut Thielicke (1908-1986), professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology at the University of Hamburg, Germany, delivered a series of sermons on the Sermon on the Mount. In one of his many sermons, he calls attention to the travesty of people by saying: "A terrible uncertainty has come over the world since it has become a house of judgment. We face the utter bankruptcy of Judgment."[274] Today, the church of Jesus faces the "utter bankruptcy of Judgment" by its hypercritical judgment of other fellowships that do not always agree with the particular status of a local body of believers. Is all judgment wrong? If so, how do we reconcile what Jesus says concerning "dogs" and "pigs"? Listen to the words of Jesus: "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs" (7:6).

The judgment that Jesus condemns is the judgment of one who mounts the high horse over other people. The judgment of 7:1 is an inaccurate comparison of ourselves with others; it is a judgment within which we magnify our own virtue and superiority. Alexander Campbell (1788-1866), early leader in the Second Great Awakening of the religious movement that is known as the Restoration Movement, writes with insight as he tackles the kind of judging that is forbidden by 7:1. Pay attention to his comments:

> Amongst Christians there is now, as there was at the beginning a very great diversity in the knowledge of the Christian institution. There are babes, children, young men, and fathers in Christ now, as well as in the days of the Apostle John. This, from the natural gifts of God, from the diversities of age, education, and circumstances, is unavoidable. And would it not be just as rational and as scriptural to excommunicate one another, because our knowledge is less or greater than any fixed measure, as for differences of opinion or matters of speculation?
>
> Indeed, in most cases where proscription [imposed restraint, prohibition] and exclusions now occur in this country, the excluded are the most intelligent members of the society; and although no community will accuse a man because he knows more of his Bible than his brethren, and on this account exclude him from their communion; yet this, it is manifest, rather than heresy, (of which, however, for consistency's sake, he must be accused,) is, in truth, the real cause of separation.
>
> If God has bestowed better gifts or better opportunities on one man than another, by which he has attained more knowledge, instead of thanking God for his kindness to the community, they beg God to take him away; and if he will not be so unkind, they will at length put him from among them under the charge of heresy. In most instances the greatest error of which a brother can be guilty, is to study his Bible more than his companions—or, at least, to surpass them in his knowledge of the mystery of Christ.[275]

How do we account for this apparent discrepancy between 7:1 and 7:6, 15? How can we determine that another person is a "dog" or another person is a "pig" if there is no judgment on the part of the person making the decision? Does this judgment go against what Jesus earlier prohibited? Can we form an opinion on those who do not abide in the ethical teachings of Jesus? Is it proper to pass judgment on those who deny that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God? Yes, John does this in his first and second epistles. Paul also passes judgment upon a brother who has sexual relations with his father's wife (1 Corinthians 5).

On the other hand, we violate Jesus' command when we criticize and condemn someone who does not have flawless comprehension of God's Word, especially if that person's reading does not coincide with our explanation of the Scriptures? Again, Campbell's comments are worthy of citation, even though lengthy:

> But the grandeur, sublimity, and beauty of the foundation of hope, and of ecclesiastical or social union, established by the author and founder of Christianity, consisted in this, that THE BELIEF OF ONE FACT, and that upon the best

[273]Ibid.

[274]Helmut Thielicke, *Life Can Begin Again*, trans. John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 150.

[275]Alexander Campbell, "To Mr. William Jones, of London, Letter IV," *Millennial Harbinger* 6, no. 3 (March 1835): 112.

evidence in the word, is all that is requisite, as far as faith goes to salvation. The belief of this ONE FACT, and submission to ONE INSTITUTION expressive of it, is all that is required of Heaven to admission into the church.[276]

So long as unity of opinion was regarded as a proper basis of religious union, so long have mankind been distracted by the multiplicity and variety of opinions. To establish what is called a system of orthodox opinions as the bond of union was, in fact, offering a premium for new diversities in opinion, and for increasing, *ad infinitum*, opinions, sects, and divisions. And what is worse than all, it was establishing self-love and pride as religious principles, as fundamental to salvation, for a love regulated by similarity of opinion, is only a love to one's own opinion; and all the zeal exhibited in the defense of it, is but the pride of opinion. [277]

It is again and again asserted, in the clearest language, by the Lord himself, the Apostles Peter, Paul, and John, that he that believes the testimony that Jesus is the Christ, is begotten by God, may overcome the world, has eternal life, and is, on the veracity of God, be saved. This should settle the first point; and as to the second, it is disposed of in a similar manner; for the witnesses agree that whosoever confesses that Jesus is the Christ, and is baptized, should be received into the church; and not an instance can be produced of any person being asked for any other faith, in order to admission, in the whole New Testament.[278]

The New Testament was not designed to occupy the same place in theological seminaries that the carcasses of malefactors are condemned to occupy in medical halls—first doomed to the gibbet [gallows], and then to the dissecting knife of the spiritual anatomist. Christianity consists infinitely more in good works than in sound opinions; and while it is a joyful truth that he that believes and is baptized shall be saved, it is equally true that he that saith, "I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."[279]

This study is concerned about those reviews of Matthew 7:1 that are in conflict with the totality of God's Word. This examination is not examining the myth that one is never to judge one's beliefs or moral course of action,[280] but rather, the focus of this study investigates the violation practiced by many Christians in their excommunicating other believers who disagree with their exposition of Scripture. Within the Churches of Christ, perfection in understanding is often the criteria by which judgment is made as to whether a person is or is not in fellowship with a particular congregation. Yet, this interpretation is not just limited to the Churches of Christ, but many denominations practice this same mentality. Carl Ketcherside (1908-1989), reformer, editor, and author within the Churches of Christ, captures the insaneness of postulating fellowship upon unanimity of opinion:

Those who were in Christ in the days of the apostles were in error on many points. They were mistaken about a lot of things but they were not charged with "preaching another gospel." Freedom from error is not a condition of salvation else all men would be damned. We are not saved by attainment to a certain degree of knowledge but by faith in Christ Jesus. It is by belief of facts related to him, and not by grasp of abstract truth, that we are justified before God. Certainly it is not by performance of meritorious deeds nor by legalistic conformity. When we postulate a program of justification by knowledge we hang ourselves on the gallows we have constructed to rid ourselves of others, unless we are prepared to make ourselves even more ridiculous by affirming that we know as much as God.[281]

When we refuse communion with certain "interpretive communities" that do not share our understanding of Scripture, we violate the prayer of Jesus in John 17 and the words of the Holy Spirit in Romans 14 and 15 as well as 1 Corinthians 8. Approximately forty years ago, the fellowship that I had been associated with for seventeen years, dissociated themselves from me because I refused to draw lines of fellowship with other believers who did not believe that individual communion cups, Sunday school,

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[276] Alexander Campbell, "The Foundation of Hope and of Christian Union," *Christians Baptist*, Vol. 1, No. 9 (April 1824):177.

[277] Ibid., 176.

[278] Ibid., 177.

[279] Ibid., 178.

[280] The Sermon on the Mount addresses beliefs and ethical behavior that is not in keeping with the commandments of God. Everyone must stress holiness as a way of life—there is no middle of the road. Having said this, it is imperative that we do not identify the teachings in the Sermon on the Mount with our particular brand of orthodoxy. It is not uncommon for Christians to read their own interpretation into the various isolated Scriptures. One's explanation often depends on which denomination one belongs to. It is not unusual for sincere Christians to describe their "interpretive community" as the bearer of all truth.

[281] Carl Ketcherside, "Another Gospel," *Mission Messenger* 27, no 1 (January 1965): 6-7.

instrumental music in the public worship service, breaking the bread in the communion rather than pinching the bread, and using wine only in the communion or grape juice only in the communion were sinful. D. A. Carson's (b. 1946), research professor of the New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, comments are to the point in his explanation of Matthew 7:1:

> What then does Jesus mean by his imperative in Matthew 7:1, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged"? Much of the confusion here is resolved when the semantic range of the Greek word translated "judge" is understood. "To judge" can mean to discern, to judge judicially, to be judgmental, to condemn (judicially or otherwise). The context must determine the precise shade of meaning. The context here argues that the verse means, "do not be judgmental." Do not adopt a critical spirit, a condemning attitude. The same verb is found twice, with identical meaning, in Romans 14:10ff.: "You, then, why do you *judge* your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: 'As I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.' So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore, let us stop *passing judgment* on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way." Jesus himself commands, "Do not be judgmental."[282]

In order to get around the implications of Matthew 7:1, many Christians cite Matthew 7: 6 and 15 in order to nullify the implications of 7:1. In actuality, numerous believers violate Matthew 7:1 without realizing that they are doing what Jesus forbids. These three Scriptures demand that each Scripture be interpreted within its intended meaning. We must not assign a meaning to Matthew 7:1 that Jesus did not intend to convey. We cannot pit Scripture against Scripture. Jesus did not preclude all judgment. If Matthew 7:1 is interpreted without consulting the context, then the two following Scriptures present a problem for the exegete:

Matthew 7:6	Matthew 7:15
Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces	Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.

Religious leaders often cite verses 6 and 15 of chapter 7 in order to nullify 7:1. Yet the judgment of 7:1 had to do with a censorious judgment about doing righteous acts to be seen of men and women, not God. Jesus began His Sermon on the Mount with castigation of the religious leaders' hypocrisy: "I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (5:20). Again, Jesus deals with the righteousness of the Pharisees this way:

> Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. [2]So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. [3]But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, [4]so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (6:1-4)

Luke records an excellent commentary on Matthew 7:1. He writes his own comments and then cites the words of Jesus concerning censorious judgment:

> To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: [10]"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. [11]The Pharisee stood up and prayed about[a] himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. [12]I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' [13]But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' [14]I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luke 18:9-14)

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[282]D. A. Carson, *The Sermon on the Mount: An Evangelical Exposition of Matthew 5-7* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 99.

[a] Or *to*

The context of the Sermon on the Mount deals with the so-called righteousness of the religious leaders. Jesus judges these leaders for outward show, and, at the same time, condemns them for their censorious judgment of others while their lifestyle demonstrates that God did not control their lives. Thus, Jesus issues His strong warning of judgment that is hypercritical, overcritical, stern, severe, and contemptuous. Today, Matthew 7:1 is frequently debased by many God-fearing followers of Jesus by entering into a spirit of censoriousness, that is to say, picking apart or pulling down any believer who does not reach an agreement with their particular brand of accepted beliefs.

On the other hand, this counsel of Jesus does not preclude us from making judgements on some occasions. For example, Jesus also speaks of "righteous judgments." He declares, "Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment" (John 7:24). Following His renunciation of judgment in Matthew 7:1, Jesus goes right to the heart of censorious judgment, "You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye" (7:5). Again, Jesus encourages the disciples to exercise caution against those who violate His teachings:

> Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. [16]By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? [17]Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. [18]A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. [19]Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. [20]Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. (7:15-20)

The admonition of Jesus in 7:1 is similar in construction to other passages in the Sermon on the Mount. Just a cursory reading of the Sermon on the Mount reveals that Jesus is addressing the leaders of Israel for their harsh judgment on others who did not measure up to their so-called righteousness, which consisted of external acts. Prior to His pronouncement about judging, we should carefully read Matthew 5 and 6 in order to catch the tone for what follows in Matthew 7:1. For instance, think about the following announcements of Jesus in its fuller context:

> Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. [2]So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. [3]But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, [4] so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (6:1-4)

> And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. [6]But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. [7]And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. [8] Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. (6:5-8)

> But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. (5:39)

> Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. (5:42)

All of these sayings from Jesus illustrate the characteristics of the men who were making judgments that Jesus addressed in Matthew 7:1. Does Jesus really mean that we must pray in our room and "close the door"? Does Jesus teach that we cannot defend ourselves if someone is trying to kill us or a family member? Does Jesus inform us that we are never to turn someone down if they wish to borrow from us? Does Jesus mean that we are never to exercise any kind of judgment? It is obvious that Jesus employs in His teaching what is known as hyperbole, that is, bold exaggeration for the sake of emphasis. Just what is Jesus teaching in Matthew 7:1? The context of 7:1 does not forbid all judgments. What does Jesus mean by His imperative?

The context of Jesus' statement does not forbid all judgment. Yet, in spite of context, many Christians ravage this Scripture in their dealings with other believers, which abuse disrupts the unity for which Jesus prayed (John 17). It is necessary that we apply correct principles of biblical interpretation in order that we do not misuse, breach, or nullify other plain teachings of Scripture. Consider, for example, the teachings of the Holy Spirit concerning judicious perception of that which is right or wrong:

> The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; [20]idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions [21]and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21)

Jesus is not condemning one's castigation of those involved in sinful acts. Both Jesus and Paul make judgments about behavior that fails to exemplify, or represent, God and Christ and the Holy Spirit. An excellent commentary on Matthew 7:1 is found in Chapters 14 and 15 of the Book of Romans. For instance, consider the following comments by Paul as he seeks to maintain the unity created by the Holy Spirit:

> Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. [2]One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. [3]The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. [4]Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. (Romans 14:1-4)

When we defy the principles set forth by Paul, we go astray from the plain teachings of Jesus in Matthew 7:1. Yet again, Paul goes once more to the very heart of the matter when he writes: "Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind" (14:5). This statement agrees with his earlier statement: "Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand" (Romans 14:4). Paul is echoing, in Romans 14:4, the teachings of Jesus in Matthew 7:1. Yet, many Christians continue to habitually go against the intended meaning of "Judge not" in order to maintain their narrow views of orthodoxy. It is plundered of its intended meaning by many well-meaning Christians in their zeal to be true to the Word of God. The most able and accomplished preachers have clashed in their explanations of Holy Scripture.

We should study Jesus' language with minute attention and study in the context of His phrase in order that we do not contravene plain teaching. Context often sets the tone for correct understanding. Justification for violation of Matthew 7:1 is based upon 7:6, 15. The following quote summarizes the problem we experience in our application of Scriptures quite well: "We perceive what is 'on our mind' and not always what is presented to us."[283] It is not uncommon for us to confuse our theoretical comprehension of God's Revelation with our interpretation.

OVERALL VIEW OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Matthew Chapter 5

It is important in our exposition of this passage (Matthew 7:1) to consider the Sermon on the Mount as a whole before we attempt to exegete a particular view. First, Jesus sets forth the characteristics that exemplify His people (5:1-9). Following the beatitudes, Jesus informs His disciples about the mistreatment of those who follow Him (5:10-13). Next in order, He then makes known to them that they are "preservatives"—the glue or cement that holds society together, that is to say, "salt" and "light" (vv. 13-16). After that, Jesus calls attention to the necessity of not breaking the commandments of God (5:17-20). Soon afterward, Jesus calls attention to the true interpretation of the Law over against that of the religious leaders in the form of six antitheses (5: 21-

[283]John C. Condon, *Semantics and Communication* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966), 17.

47). In this Sermon, we are taught how to behave in our walk with God and others. We are counseled that God's Law is relevant for every area of our lives, and we are informed as to what God demands of us in order to praise Him.

Matthew Chapter 6

Jesus continues His discussion of the acts of piety that honors God: [1] giving to the needy (6:1-4); [2] praying in sincerity (6:5-15); and [3] fasting as a means of enhancing one's own spiritual renewal (6:16-18). These performances of devotion were not simply to be external accomplishments, but internal transactions. God is concerned with the heart, not just outward acts. Whatever activity we perform, we must do this to God's glory. Jesus warns His disciples of the perils of simply doing deeds to be seen of men and women. Following this exposition of true piety, Jesus admonishes His children about the hazards of worldliness, that is, the jeopardy of living for the temporal possessions of life (6:19-34).

Matthew Chapter 7

In this chapter, Jesus concentrates on relationships. His disciples are all members of God's community. Therefore, His children should not sit in faultfinding, hypercritical, scrupulous, and fussy judgments (7:1-5). As stated above, even though Jesus issues an injunction against judging, nevertheless, this admonition, as cited above, is followed immediately by "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs" (7:6) and "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves" (7:15). Hence, it is evident that "Do not judge" (7:1), in the first five verses of chapter 7, Jesus must have reference to judgment of His people other than discernment of those who have rejected the Gospel of God.

"Do not judge" (7:1), is <u>not</u> the same judgment that Jesus speaks of in verses 6 and 15. The judging in verses 6 and 15 deals with those who have spurned the ethical behavior that Jesus calls for and the rejection of the "Good News" of the Kingdom, that is, Jesus as God's way of salvation. The ones whom Jesus addresses in these verses (7:6, 15) are echoed in Romans 2:8: "But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger." Matthew 7:1 contemplates, not those who have repudiated God, but rather those who have acquiesced to the teachings of Jesus. Christians are not to judge their fellow believers in the sense of being censorious, faultfinding, hypercritical, or overcritical in their analysis of their spiritual welfare and of their relation to God and other Christians.

Many denominations frequently violate Matthew 7:1 by insisting that individuals conform to their particular brand of orthodoxy, or accepted beliefs. We violate Jesus' injunction against judging when we insist that one adhere to our particular understanding of God's Word. Fee and Stuart capture the problem that churches exhibit in their attitudes toward others who do not necessarily conform to their grasp, or discernment, of God's Word:

> Without necessarily intending to, we bring our theological heritage, our ecclesiastical traditions, our cultural norms, or our existential concerns to the Epistles as we read them. And this results in all kinds of selectivity or "getting around" certain texts.[284]

James our Lord's brother also reiterates this teaching of Jesus in his Epistle:

> Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. [12]There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor? (James 4:11-12)

To speak against a brother or sister is to scorn the Law of God. It is a violation of the "royal law" found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (2:8) because it is the supreme law that is the source and

[284]Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 58.

summation of all laws governing human relationships (Matthew 22:36-40; Romans 13:8-10). James, no doubt, had in mind the words of Jesus when he wrote:

> Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, [13]because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment! (James 2:12-13)

Paul captures the very heart of Jesus' warning in Matthew 7:1, when he discusses, as stated above, the "weak versus the strong" in his Epistle to the Romans (chapters 14 and 15). The spirit that Paul condemns—and Jesus condemns—is that feeling of superiority, that is to say, an outlook that we are all right while others are all wrong. It is that spirit or tendency to be sanctimonious — big "me" and little "you." There is a difference between meekness and arrogance. In meekness we are to deal with one's understanding of God's Word—maturity as well as immaturity. On the other hand, arrogance does not make allowances for one's imperfection in understanding. Haughtiness is the mentality that is willing to take a meat cleaver in order to hack one to death for an honest misunderstanding of the Sacred Writings. Jesus denounces censorious actions, but humility is sanctioned. It is in this vein that Paul exemplifies the commandment of Jesus ("Do not judge," Matthew 7:1) when he writes his instructions to the Romans:

> Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. [2]One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. [3]The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. [4]Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. (Romans 14:1-4)

Romans 14:1-4 is an excellent commentary on Matthew 7:1. Paul is confronting the issue of imperfection in knowledge head-on. This deformity in perception calls for toleration on the part of both parties. Within the Christian community, there are infants, there are children, there are young men and women, and there are old men and women. No one is at the same level of knowledge. None of God's children has 20/20 vision. God's people can no more all think alike than they can all look alike. God has never made absolute perfection in knowledge a condition of salvation, if so, no one could be saved—that includes you!

Since Matthew 7:6 and 7:15 are employed by many within the Churches of Christ as well as other denominations to set aside Jesus' instructions in 7:1, it is appropriate to refer to one of the founders of the Movement known as the Churches of Christ. Alexander Campbell understood the implications of Matthew 7:1, Romans 14 & 15, and James 2:12-13; 4:11-12). This Movement started out as a Reformation Movement, not a Restoration Movement.[285] This Restoration Movement originated out of a sectarian background among the Presbyterians. Thomas Campbell (1763-1854), father of Alexander Campbell (1788-1866), had been defrocked for offering the communion to other Presbyterians not of his orthodox party.

Thomas Campbell understood the biblical principles of making allowances for one another. He had captured the essence of "Do not judge." He had grasped the reality of Christian forbearance toward those who did not comprehend the teachings of the Bible as he did. When there were doctrinal differences, he exercised humility, leniency, and moderation toward those whom he knew to be in fellowship with God. In his *Declaration and Address (*1809), he went right to the moral fiber of attitudes that Christians should exercise toward another in dealing with differences within the Christian community. The following excerpts from the *Declaration and Address* express the "intent" of Matthew 7:1:

> **Proposition 6.** That although inferences and deductions from Scripture premises, when fairly inferred, may be truly called the doctrine of God's holy word, yet are they not formally binding upon the consciences of Christians farther than they perceive the connection, and evidently see that they are so; for their faith must not stand in the wisdom of men, but in

[285]The distinction between a Reformation Movement and a Restoration Movement is that one seeks to bring about reform within the body of Christ, whereas the other (Restoration) seeks to restore that which ceased to exist. Campbell sought to bring about unity within the various denominations. He maintained that the church needed reform. His movement degenerated into a Restoration Movement.

the power and veracity of God. Therefore, so such deduction can be made terms of communion, but do properly belong to the after and progressive edification of the Church. Hence, it is evident that no such deductions or inferential truths ought to have any place in the Church's confession.[286]

Proposition 7. That although doctrinal exhibitions of the great system of Divine truths, and defensive testimonies in opposition to prevailing errors, be highly expedient, and the more full and explicit they be for those purposes, the better; yet, as these must be in a great measure the effect of human reasoning, and of course must contain many inferential truths, they ought not to be made terms of Christian communion; unless we suppose, what is contrary to fact, that none have a right to the communion of the Church, but such as possess a very clear and decisive judgment, or are come to a very high degree of doctrinal information; where as the Church from the beginning did, and ever will, consist of little children and young men, as well as fathers.[287]

Proposition 8. It is not necessary that persons should have a particular knowledge of distinct apprehensions of all Divinely revealed truths in order to entitle them to a place in the Church.[288]

CONCLUSION

Matthew 7:1 does not mean the refusal to practice any discrimination between right and wrong or of pronouncing "right judgment" as taught by Jesus (John 7:24). The best way to illustrate this "judging" is to reflect upon the self-righteousness of the Pharisees. In this Sermon, so it appears, our Lord had the Pharisees' hypocritical judgment in mind. They had misinterpreted the Law. They were pretentious, boastful, braggarts in their giving to the needy, pompous in their prayers, and ostentatious in their fasting. They were object-oriented, earthly-minded, unspiritual, and greedy in their vision with regard to the material and spiritual things of this world. Pay attention, once more, to Jesus as He calls awareness to their external righteousness: "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20).

A certain amount of repetition is necessary in order to help remove the underbrush of traditions that has hidden the true interpretation of Jesus' sayings to His disciples. Once more, the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9-14) is a bang-up commentary on Matthew 7:1. Jesus warns His disciples of this breed of behavior. May God help us to "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:2-3). Jesus graphically depicts the kind of judging, as stated earlier in this Chapter, He prohibits in His Sermon on the Mount what He rebuked the religious leaders of in His Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector:

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable:
[10]"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. [11]The Pharisee stood up and prayed about[a] himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. [12]I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' [13]But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' [14]I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luke 18:9-14)

The next chapter (10) analyzes another abused text by many sincere and godly men and women. Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount, discusses the narrow and wide gates (Matthew 7:13-14). This Scripture is frequently taken out of context to uphold the narrow and sectarian attitudes of many Christians. Chapter 10 looks at the context in order to determine the meaning one should attach to this loosely cited text. Again, this citation from Jesus needs to be reviewed through new eyes. Unconsciously, Christians often crucify their intellect when it comes to reexamination of "pet" Scriptures. It is difficult for us to escape the bondage of our

[286]Thomas Campbell, *Declaration and Address* in C. A. Young, *Historical Documents Advocating Christian Union* (Joplin, Missouri, 1985), 110.

[287]Ibid., 110, 111.

[288]Ibid., 111.

[a] Or *to*

reigning orthodoxy. For many Christians, dogmatic certainty is the only way to meet their needs. This examination of Matthew 7:13-14 calls into question the theology of our forefathers. If we wish to escape the past, we must study the context in which the interpretation of a particular Scripture originated.

10

The Narrow Gate

> One benefits from the realization that everyone approaches the study of the Scriptures with his own set of complex circumstances and understandings. On one side are the personal factors or prejudices that affect the judgment of the interpreter. On the other side are the philosophical and theological assumptions or presuppositions that the interpreter shares with some others. Both play significant roles in the result of one's study. While some have attempted to approach the Scriptures strictly from a neutral stance, without presuppositions, the results have been disappointing. Instead of attempting to discard all influencing factors, one may take appropriate cautionary steps, as listed by Stanton: (a) the awareness of the danger of prejudices and presuppositions; (b) the use of historical-critical method; and (c) allowing one's own presuppositions to be modified or even remolded by the text itself. One will not interpret the text as much as the text will interpret him[289]

As a young preacher, I cited Jesus' words about the narrow and wide gates to uphold my narrow and restricted attitude. I called upon these two sayings (Matthew 7:13-14) to entice others to join my party—the company of believers that I erroneously identified as the "narrow gate." For one not to be in the band that I belonged to was equivalent to being in the all-embracing road to hell. For one not to be in my circle—one-cup and non-Sunday school—then, that person was on his or her way to the "underworld." Why? Well, they were on the "spacious" road—the road that leads to eternal damnation. Scores of devout Christians still hold to this erroneous view of Matthew 7:13-14. This illegal use of this saying of Jesus is not a willful rejection of the true teachings of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount by its adherents, but rather it is simply an honest mistake of the intellect.

Unfortunately, this Scripture is still relied upon by numberless sincere believers within the various divisions within the Stone/Campbell Movement to try to get people in line with the traditions of a select few. This citation of Scripture is often alluded to by many well-meaning Christians to browbeat those who do not adjust into conformity to their eccentric fellowship. If one does not adhere to certain doctrinal understandings of a distinctive "interpretive community," then that person is not in the "narrow way" according to certain segments of the Stone/Campbell Restoration Movement.

Countless Christians still repeat this phrase ("narrow gate") to denounce those who do not concur with their critical views about individual communion cups, Bible study classes, instrumental music in the Sunday morning worship, solos, hand-clapping in the assembly, women teachers, Bible colleges, and so on. Innumerable individuals conclude that every human being that strays from toeing the party line is on the "broad road" that leads to death. Today, there are over two-dozen splinter groups that lay claim to the "narrow road." One assembly of believers is not willing to express fellowship with another association of unwavering saints. To one crowd the limited way is their restricted reading of certain Scriptures. To another fellowship the *thin channel* is their exposition of Holy Scripture. This chapter will analyze the "orthodox way" in the light of the

[289]Ted Carruth, "The Implication of Proper Principles of Biblical Interpretation for Christian Unity", in F. Furman Kearley, Edward P. Myers, and Timothy D. Hadley, editors, *Biblical Interpretation Principles and Practice: Studies in Honor of Jack Pearl Lewis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), 53.

whole of the Sermon on the Mount. Just what does our Lord have reference to when he mentions the "narrow way"?[290]

THE NARROW ROAD VERSUS THE BROAD ROAD

We must choose to follow the commandments of God or the commandments of men. One way is easy, the other way is hard. The boundaries are clearly distinguished. One gate leads to destruction, the other gate leads to eternal life. Revealed truths compel obedience to God's way. To enter the "narrow gate," we must leave "self" behind. On the other hand, to enter the "roomy way," there is no limit to the baggage—self-righteousness, pride, hatred, envy, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, discord, and so on. The "narrow gate" is the very opposite of these works of the flesh.

The objective of our Lord in this "Sermon on the Mount" is to bring people to an understanding of their nature, their character, and their practice of the two great commandments—love for God and love for one another (22:34-40). We must realize that kingdom behavior is set forth in the beatitudes (5:3-12). This kind of conduct is the narrow road and the narrow gate that Jesus addresses in His Sermon—not individual cups, Sunday school, solos, handclapping, instrumental music, and so on.[291] The realm of the New Jerusalem is a dominion of light. This kingdom consists of those who allow their good works to be seen by men in order that God may be praised (5:14).

Jesus speaks of ethical behavior that is in harmony with the will of God as that which God desires in His children. It is an inward righteousness that God is delighted in, not external righteousness. Following the beatitudes, Jesus addresses the praiseworthy performance that is pleasing to the Father and the unworthy conduct that is not acceptable to the Father. He explains that the quality of one's actions that pleases God is practice that is in harmony with the intent of God's Law:

> Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. [18] I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. [19] Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. [20] For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. (5:17-20)

Paul also addresses kingdom conduct in his Epistle to the Galatians. To begin with, he tells the Galatians that a certain course of action will prevent their entering the kingdom of heaven:

> The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; [20]idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions [21]and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21)

These works of the flesh will prevent us from inheriting God's kingdom. This kind of behavior is not kingdom behavior. Rather, it is the "broad road" that leads to eternal damnation. When we compare kingdom behavior with worldly behavior, we are reminded of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in which He calls for radical reformation in our lifestyle. Paul, too, paints a picture of the "broad road" in 5:19-21. Following this catalogue of negative behavior, he then enumerates "good works" that are representative of the "narrow road":

> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23]gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. [24]Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions

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[290]Those who advance this skewed, or distorted, interpretation are not dishonest or deceitful in their views; they are simply misguided from years of listening to preachers and teachers who, too, were taught incorrectly. One objective of this chapter is to help Christians learn how to read the Word of God more accurately, that is to say, in context.

[291]Many believers assume that the "narrow gate" is associated with individual communion cups, Sunday school, solos, handclapping, instrumental music, and so on. Yet, the context does not uphold such a view.

and desires. [25]Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. [26]Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. (5:22-26)

Again, Paul stresses the nature of the kingdom in the Book of Romans. Paul goes right to the heart of the "narrow way": "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men" (Romans 14:17-18). The Kingdom of heaven's righteousness is not to be confused with the darkness of Satan's kingdom (the broad road). We are now, in the words of Paul, "set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness" (6:18).

Beginning with Matthew 5:21 and going through 5:48, we discover that Jesus again sets forth the distinctive characteristics that are representative of the righteousness that is and is not pleasing to God. "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago" [**Ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη τοῖς ἀρχαίοις**, *Ēkousate hoti errethē tois archaiois*, "You heard that it was said to the ancients"] (5:21) stands for the "broad road," on the other hand, "But I tell you" [**ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν**, *egō de legō hymin*, "but I tell you"] (5:22) characterizes the "narrow road" that Jesus addresses toward the end of His Sermon (7:13-14). We detect the "broad road" in "You heard that it was said to the ancients."

The "broad road" is composed of people who perform their "acts of righteousness" to be seen of men (Matthew 6:1). The "broad road" is about human beings who pray to be "seen by men" (6:5). The "broad road" consists of individuals who fast to "show men they are fasting" (6:16). On the other hand, the "narrow road" embodies men and women who give to be seen by God, who pray to be seen by God, and who fast to be seen by God. The "narrow road" and "narrow gate" involve individuals who are bankrupt in spirit (5:3). It includes people who mourn because of their sins (5:4). It contains human beings who are meek as a result of their bankruptness and mourning (5:4). It encompasses those who hunger and thirst after the righteousness that is inward—a righteousness that glorifies God (5:6). It embraces one who is merciful (5:7); and it encloses one who is pure in heart (5:8).

This "narrow way" had nothing to do with the many peripheral issues that divide so many Christians within the Stone/Campbell Restoration Movement and other denominations. This "narrow way" had nothing to do with absolute perfection in knowledge. Jesus' "narrow way" had nothing to do with the performance of "five-acts" of worship on Sunday morning. For example, the believers in Rome and Corinth did not possess flawlessness in their comprehension of God's written Revelation; nevertheless, they were still in the "narrow way" as a result of abiding by the principles set forth in the Sermon on the Mount. There were doctrinal differences within the early community of God, but, nonetheless, they were still exhorted to follow Jesus, so that with one mouth and heart they could glorify God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 15:5). The beatitudes describe what the "narrow road" and the "narrow gate" is all about—holiness in one's life (Matthew 5:3-20).

In our Lord's Prayer (6:9-14), Jesus taught His disciples to pray: "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." Again, He says, "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you" (6:12, 14). Forgiveness is a part of the "narrow road." As stated above, Jesus begins this Sermon by expounding upon the characteristics that must be manifest in the life of every follower of Christ. It is imperative that we be "poor in spirit" (5:3), that is to say, we must not be self-righteous.

Following this Sermon, on another occasion, Jesus had the opportunity to illustrate this aspect of His Sermon on humility with the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14). In this parable, Jesus illustrates the sanctimonious spirit of the Pharisee. This holier-than-thou kind of spirit leads to destruction—it is the "broad way." Our attitude should be like the attitude that Paul expresses in his Galatian letter: "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted" (Galatians 6:1).

In order to stress the true meaning of the "narrow road," it is necessary to exercise repetition in the retelling of some of the beatitudes. Once more, the second beatitude—"Blessed are those who mourn" (Matthew 5:4)—describes the feelings of an individual that is poverty-stricken in spirit. We ache over our sins. And, as a result of our destitution, this brooding will display a make-up of unpretentiousness (5:5). We will not

pray, "God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get" (Luke 18:11). This self-righteousness is the "broad road" that leads to destruction.

If we are bankrupt in spirit, if we are mourning because of our sins, then we will be meek and we will unremittingly long for goodness. We will yearn for virtues that belong to God. Jesus says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (Matthew 5:6). This specific beatitude blesses not only the deed but also the dream that never comes true. Yet, in spite of all our failures, we still strive toward faultlessness. Our Lord expresses it this way: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (5:48). We must mirror God in all our actions.

We are the "salt" and "light" of the world (5:13-16). Our morality must exceed that of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law. "For I tell you," says Jesus, "that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (5:20). Remember that the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees' righteousness lay in externals (to be seen by men), not inward (to be seen by God). The righteousness of the religious leaders embodies the "broad way," not the "narrow way."

As stated above, Jesus now proceeds to show His disciples that His followers must put into practice the righteousness of God, which righteousness deals with ethical conduct. He demonstrates this kind of righteousness by giving detailed instructions concerning murder (5:21-26), adultery (5:27-30), divorce (5:31-32), oaths (5:33-37), an eye for an eye (5:38-42), love for one's enemies (5:43-48), giving to the needy (6:1-4), praying (6:5-15), fasting (6:16-18), laying up treasures (6:19-24), worrying (6:25-34), and judging others (7:1-6). In this Sermon, Jesus approaches the believer's whole disposition toward others. He lays down the kind of ethical behavior that constitutes the course of action that is representative of the "narrow way"—performance that God is pleased with.

Jesus says, in effect, that good behavior is kingdom behavior. This kind of ethical behavior is the "narrow road" and the "narrow gate." Jesus now comes to exhortation and to application. He warns that it is not praise, as such, from our lips that will enable us to enter the kingdom of heaven, but rather the practice of conduct set forth in His Sermon. This Sermon is functional. It is meant to be lived. It is something that everyone is to achieve and execute. Paul throughout his epistles stresses this kind of behavior. We only have to reflect upon the writings of Paul to the Ephesians (Chapters 4 and 5) to capture the essence of Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount:

> Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love (4:2); Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (4:3); Each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor (4:25); Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen (4:29); Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you (4:32); Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (5:1-2); But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people (5:3); Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving (5:4); For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God (Ephesians 5:5).

CONCLUSION

The Christian message is not some ideological theory, but something that is to be lived. The "narrow road" and "narrow gate" have to do with our everyday living—our relationship to God and to one another. It is works of the Spirit versus works of the flesh. Paul, no doubt, echoed the thoughts of our Lord Jesus when he expresses himself to the Galatians: "So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature" (Galatians 5:16). **If we are to interpret the Sermon on the Mount correctly, we must not isolate a Scripture from its context.** The immediate context clarifies Jesus' summary statement of His Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew 7:13-14. Jesus gives His commentary on these verses in the very beginning of His Sermon (5:1-16.)

The religious leaders failed in this kind of ethical behavior demanded by God. Just as John the Baptist confronted the religious leaders concerning their ethical and religious behavior (3:7-12), so Jesus also confronted these same religious leaders. After setting forth the "narrow way," He then warned His disciples about these leaders. Listen, once more, to Christ's penetrating words:

> Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. [18]I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. [19]Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. [20]For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. (5:17-20)

Beginning with 5:21 through 7:12, Jesus describes two ways—the bad and the good. Jesus discusses "murder" (5:21-26), "adultery" (5:27-30), "divorce" (5:31-31), "oaths" (5:33-37), "an eye for an eye" (5:38-42), "love for enemies" (5:43-48), "giving to the needy" (6:1-4), "prayer" (6:5-15), "fasting" (6:16-18), "treasures in heaven" (6:19-24), "worry" (6:25-34), "judging others" (7:1-6), and "asking, seeking, and knocking" (7:7-12). Jesus' comments on these subjects explain His comments in 7:13-14—the narrow and wide gates. This text is an old text that needs to be reexamined through new eyes.

Chapter 11 sets forth another old text that needs to be reevaluated through new eyes. Second John 9 is another Scripture that Christians frequently take out of context in order to maintain justification for ostracism of those who do not conform to their particular party line. The phrase "doctrine of Christ" (**διδαχῆ τοῦ Χριστοῦ**, *didachē tou Christou*) is frequently identified as the "teachings of Christ," not the teaching **about** Christ having come in the flesh. The expression "doctrine of Christ" could be subjective genitive (noun in the genitive [Christ] produces the action) or objective genitive (noun in the genitive [Christ] receives the action). How do we determine which is which? The answer is found in the context. Our proper application of this passage should assist us in maintaining the unity for which our Lord Jesus prayed (John 17).

11

Doctrine of Christ:
2 John 9

> The main concern in the right use of the Word of God is its proper interpretation. Whether preaching is textual or topical or expository it rests ultimately upon the minister's interpretation of the Word of God. That theological discipline which takes as its goal the proper interpretation of Scripture is hermeneutics. A solid hermeneutics is the root of all good exegesis and exegesis is the foundation of all truly Biblical preaching. Therefore a sound hermeneutics is an absolute *desideratum* for the minister of the Word of God.[292]

What did John mean by the "teaching of Christ" (2 John 9, NIV) in this short letter "to the chosen lady and her children" (v. 1)? Second John 9 is called forth to justify separation from other Christians who do not always agree with another group of Christians on certain doctrinal issues. Unfortunately, the "teaching of Christ" ("doctrine of Christ," KJV) is used by many Christians to fracture the body of Christ. Within many fellowships, the "doctrine of Christ" includes whatever the particular fellowship espouses. Just what does the "doctrine of Christ" mean? Does the "teaching of Christ" in 2 John 9 condemn instrumental music in the so-called corporate worship service? Does this verse denounce the use of a plurality of cups in the distribution of the fruit of the vine in the observance of the Lord's Supper? Do we break the rules found in 2 John 9 for participation in teaching children on Sunday in a Sunday school classroom? Do we transgress 2 John 9 if we use wine instead of grape juice in the communion? Do we overstep 2 John 9 if we "break" the bread instead of "pinching" the bread? If we practice "hand clapping" in the assembly, do we violate the "teaching of Christ" in 2 John 9? Can we sing a "solo" in the congregation and not disobey the "teaching of Christ" in 2 John 9? These are questions that need answering!

Almost every split (approximately twenty-five) within the Stone/Campbell Movement[293] cites this particular Scripture to uphold their doctrinal purity and to justify their separation from other believers who do not always see "eye-to-eye" with the so-called infallible interpreters.[294] If we do not condemn instrumental

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[292]Bernard L. Ramm (1916-1992), "Biblical Interpretation," in Bernard L. Ramm, editor, *Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 5, 6.

[293]For an objective story of the Stone/Campbell Movement, see Leroy Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement: An Anecdotal History of the Three Churches* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press Publishing Company, 1981).

[294]For a classic example of this mindset, see Ray Dutton, "To: The Elders of the Landmark church of Christ" in *Seibles Road Church of Christ (November 3, 1996): 1-3, where,* in his condemnation of Buddy Bell, pulpit minister for the Landmark Church of Christ in Montgomery, AL, he says (p. 3)*:*

> The apostle John told us exactly how we are to handle false teachers who come to us with their apostasies: *Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.* (2 Jn. 9-11).

music in the so-called worship assembly, then, 2 John 9 is cited to justify the "meat cleaver" action against any who would dare disagree with the splinter group cry. If we seek to have fellowship with those who employ instrumental music in their worship service, then, 2 John 9 is applied,[295] even though they themselves may not use the instrument.

Since there is much controversy over the phrase "doctrine of Christ" (**διδαχῆ τοῦ Χριστοῦ**, *didachē tou Christou*) in John's Second Epistle, it is incumbent upon all Christians to seek to ascertain the meaning employed by the author. Just what did John mean by this particular expression? The purpose of this chapter is to discover the intent of the writer in order that we might unite rather than divide over so many trivial positions. To arrive at a correct understanding of how John utilizes this phrase, it is necessary to examine the Greek genitive (Christ).

Should we interpret "doctrine of Christ" as the "**teaching <u>of Christ</u>**" (subjective genitive— **διδαχῆ τοῦ Χριστοῦ**) or "teaching **<u>about Christ</u>**" (objective genitive— **διδαχῆ τοῦ Χριστοῦ).** The context will have to decide! The immediate surroundings generally serve to exhibit the writer's own definition. The subjective genitive is the most widely advanced belief among the Churches of Christ as well as other denominations. Each division within the Churches of Christ claims this particular Scripture (2 John 9) as its own. It just so happens, according to each faction, that the "doctrine of Christ" represents one's own brand of orthodoxy. To disagree with a particular fellowship is tantamount to not abiding in the "doctrine of Christ."

SUBJECTIVE GENITIVE

Imperfection in knowledge

It is imperative that we understand "doctrine of Christ" (**διδαχῆ τοῦ Χριστοῦ**, *didachē tou Christou*) [KJV] in 2 John 9 in order to promote unity for which Christ prayed (John 17). First, if we interpret "doctrine of Christ" as the teachings of Jesus concerning a worship service (subjective genitive—**διδαχῆ τοῦ Χριστοῦ,** *didachē tou Christou*), which is the common interpretation of 2 John 9, then for one to disagree with the status quo of a particular group is in essence to disagree with the "doctrine of Christ." This point of view equates our own particular interpretation of the Scriptures concerning church organization and the so-called social worship service as on equal footing with the Word of God itself.[296] When this happens, then, this mishandling of the Word leads to some exegetical problems. For example, no one has flawless knowledge of God's written Revelation. Paul deals with this "know-it-all" attitude in the Corinthian letter. Christians, according to Paul, can be mistaken about some doctrinal issues and still abide in the "doctrine of Christ." Imperfection in knowledge, "in-and-of-itself," does not mean that we are not abiding in the "doctrine of Christ."

On page 3, of this same article, he writes: "When I asked Buddy if he believed solos, choirs, and quartets were scriptural in worship, he did not even hesitate with his answer. He told me in no uncertain terms that he believed that the practice of using solos, choirs, and quartets was in his words. 'very scriptural.'"

[295]See **C. A. Smith**, "Special Music" in *Old Paths Advocate* LXVV, no. 3 (March 1996): 4-5, where he writes:

> Unless someone shows me I am wrong. I cannot bid "God speed" to such for I would be guilty of endorsing that which I believe is a dangerous practice. (2 John 9-11), and that would make me a partaker in their evil deeds. As I have heard brother **Lynwood Smith** [1924-2007] say, several times: "I am Church of Christ to the core, and I hope that it shows in every area of my walk for the Lord." Nobody likes good singing better than I do, but let us please respect God's Word, the church, our brethren and ourselves and use it to glorify and praise God.

[296]Within the Churches of Christ, generally, the "doctrine of Christ" centers on one's concept of the "five acts" of worship. In other words, five rituals performed in a precise manner are imperative for us to abide in the "doctrine of Christ." If we employ instrumental music in worship, then we are not abiding in the "doctrine of Christ." If we employ Sunday school in the teaching of children and adults, then we are not abiding in the "doctrine of Christ." If we utilize individual cups in the communion, then we are not abiding in the "doctrine of Christ." If we take money out of the church treasure to assist individuals who are not Christians, then we are not abiding in the "doctrine of Christ." The list is almost without measure.

Listen to the words of Paul as he sets forth this concept of imperfection in knowledge: "We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God" (1 Corinthians 8:1-3). Did we catch this phrase? "The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know"? What does this Scripture mean? Is Paul advancing the concept that "blemish" in knowledge is tantamount to damnation? Is he advancing the notion that "deformity" in knowledge is the same as not abiding in the "doctrine of Christ"?

How do we reconcile the following statement of Paul (Romans 14:1) to the common (subjective genitive) interpretation of 2 John 9? We would do well to listen to Paul as he discusses toleration for the weak in understanding: "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters" (Romans 14:1). Is this spirit of toleration the same attitude that we practice in dealing with differences within the Christian community? Do we advance the same spirit of mercifulness for imperfection in knowledge that Paul admonished the Romans to adhere to? Again, we should give careful attention to the Holy Spirit's words: "Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind" (Romans 14:5). Do we read this as, "Each one should be fully convinced according to my own mind"? Have we substituted "my" for "theirs"?

Holiness of Life

A second alternative[297] to the "doctrine of Christ" (subjective genitive) is the *teachings* of Jesus Messiah to His disciples. For example, the Sermon on the Mount is an illustration of the teachings of Jesus.[298] Yet, this understanding of the phrase cannot be understood in an absolute sense. For instance, how many Christians abide in the "teachings of Christ" in an absolute sense? The wording of 2 John 9 does not allow for departure: "Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God." Yet, John clearly states that no man is without sin: "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8).

There are **no mitigating circumstances** for John. Anyone who does not abide in the "doctrine of Christ" does not have God. Surely John is not writing about sinless perfection in one's life. John, earlier, had rebuked individuals who maintained that they had no sin (1 John 1:10). God forbid that any Christian should be guilty of the sin of "perfectionism." None of us has perfect knowledge. None of us lives a perfect life. We are all striving unto perfection in both zones.

Subjective Genitive: Noun in the Genitive Produces the Action

What is meant by subjective genitive? The subjective genitive occurs when the noun in the genitive[299] produces the action. To illustrate this principle, it is helpful to review another well-known passage in the Pauline corpus: "If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For Christ's love (**ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ**, *agapē tou Christou*) compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died" (2 Corinthians 5:13-14). The context clearly indicates that the noun in the

[297]This second alternative is not under consideration from the context—even though John addresses ethical behavior in this Second Epistle. The context for "doctrine of Christ" appears to have reference to the confession that Jesus had come in the flesh.

[298] John addresses the teachings of Jesus in his Gospel and his Book of Revelation, as well as his Epistles. No one denies that one can be in fellowship with God and, at the same time, flagrantly flaunt the teachings of Christ in his or her daily life. See 2 John 4-6 in which he deals with loving one another as Jesus commanded. See also 1 John 2: 3-6. "Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did," writes John (v. 6). It is worthy of notice that even the scholars that advance the subjective genitive, still do not advance the notion of absolute perfection in holiness, on the part of men and women, as prerequisite to fellowship with God. When they speak of subjective genitive, their writings indicate that they have in mind the teachings of Jesus as found in the Sermon on the Mount, not rules and regulations to govern five acts to be performed on Sunday morning.

[299]For an explanation of "case" in Greek, see Ray Summers, *Essentials of New Testament Greek* (Nashville: Broadman, 1950), 16-18.

genitive (Christ, Χριστοῦ) means the love that Christ has for us, not our love for Christ. The context shows that the phrase (Christ's love) refers to the love which Christ has for us. That is to say, Jesus is the one doing the loving. The noun (Christ—Χριστοῦ) in the genitive produced the action. It is not the case that determines the point, but the context.

One more illustration is in order to clearly demonstrate the use of the subjective genitive. Paul employs the subjective genitive when he writes about Jesus' preaching: "Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ" (**ὁ κήρυγμα Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ**, *ho kērygma Iēsou Christou*) [Romans 16:25]. Jesus **produced** the preaching. In other words, the preaching was not **about** (objective genitive) Jesus, but rather the proclamation of the Good News **by** Jesus Messiah (**Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ**, *Iēsou Christou*) Himself.[300]

Objective Genitive:
Noun in the Genitive Receives the Action

What is meant by the objective genitive? The objective genitive receives the action of the noun. The subjective genitive produces the action of the noun. An example of the *objective genitive* is found in Jesus' rebuke of the religious authorities: "I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit (**πνεύματος βλασφημία**, *pneumatos blasphēmia*) will not be forgiven" (Matthew 12:31).[301] The noun "Spirit" did not produce (subjective) the action ("blasphemy") against Himself, but rather He received (objective) the action. Again, it is the context that determines the meaning, not the case in-and-of-itself. The noun **πνεύματος** *(pneumatos*) is spelled the same in Greek. It is only the context that determines whether the noun in the "genitive" is *subjective* or *objective.*

As stated above, many sincere Christians rely upon 2 John 9 to justify their disconnection from other believers on the basis that they are not continuing in the "doctrine of Christ" ("teaching of Christ, " NIV). But many sincere Christians have not weighed the context very carefully to determine whether the noun in the genitive **produced** the action or **received** the action. In other words, did the genitive (Christ, **Χριστοῦ**, *Christou*) produce the action (teaching produced by Christ), or is the genitive the receiver of the action (teaching about Christ having come in the flesh)?

In seeking a correct answer to the problem of interpretation in 2 John 9, it is necessary to draw attention to the fact that no person has a right to foist into his or her expositions of Scripture one's own dogmatic speculations, or the interpretation of others, and then insist that these conclusions are an essential part of divine Revelation. Many Christians misapply this Scripture to uphold their sectarian attitude (not deliberately in my judgment) toward those who do not conform to their particular brand of orthodoxy concerning a so-called worship service.[302] If we approach the Scriptures with our own pre-conceived impressions and are anxious to put our own sense upon the text that coincides with our own sentiments rather than the thoughts of the author, then we will never be able to arrive at a correct understanding of the passage in question.

SCHOLARSHIP: OBJECTIVE GENITIVE

There are many eminent scholars who understand the genitive "of Christ" (**Χριστοῦ**, *Christou*) in 2 John 9 as *objective genitive* (receives the action), not *subjective genitive* (produces the action). Thus the phrase, as

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[300]See Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1927), 78.

[301] Ibid.

[302]I do not think this misuse of 2 John 9 is deliberate on the part of those men and women seeking to be true to the Word of God. In spite of their sincerity, it is necessary to draw attention again to the fact that the whole system of God's Revelation must be explained so as to be consistent with itself. In order to ascertain the meaning that is attached to any word or phrase, we must examine the context. The word "context" is from Latin, which means to "weave together" and is applied to written documents. The context is the connection of thought that runs through every passage, which constitutes for itself a whole. The immediate context is that which immediately precedes or follows a given word, phrase, or sentence. Not only must the context be considered, but one must also investigate the scope and plan of the author.

interpreted by many scholars, means "doctrine about the person of Christ" (**objective genitive**) rather than the "teachings of Christ" (subjective genitive). The following commentaries illustrate the ***objective genitive*** in their interpretation of the context of 2 John 9:

Rudolph Bultmann

Rudolph Bultmann (1884-1976), who was Professor of New Testament and Early History of the University of Marburg, wrote:

> **Τοῦ Χριστοῦ** [*Tou Christou*, "of Christ"] may be taken as a subjective genitive; it is more probable, however, that "of Christ" is an objective genitive, since the author hangs everything on his Christology, i.e., on the doctrine about Christ, as v. 7 shows. Judgment is passed on the disciple of the heretical doctrine by the phrase, **θεὸν οὐκ ἔχει** [*theon ouk echei*, "does not have God"]; this corresponds to 1 Jn 2:23, where it is said of "the one denying the Son," **οὐδὲ τὸν πατέρα ἔχει** [*oude ton patera echei* , "he does not have the Father"]. That means: he stands outside the fellowship of God.[303]

David Smith

Dr. David Smith's comments on this verse (2 John 9) also capture the very heart of John's concern over Gnostic rejection of Jesus having come in the flesh:

> **Τῇ διδαχῇ τοῦ Χριστοῦ** [***Tē didachē tou Christou***, "doctrine of Christ"]. The teaching which recognizes Jesus as the Christ (1 Jn. 4:1-2), i. e., the Messiah, the Savior.[304]

Kenneth Wuest

Also, Kenneth S. Wuest (1893-1962), instructor in New Testament Greek at Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, expresses his agreement with David Smith:

> "Doctrine" is *didachē*, "teaching," namely, that which is taught. Smith says that it is the teaching which recognizes Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior. We have a genitive of reference, "teaching with reference to Christ. . . ." The person therefore, who goes beyond the teaching of the incarnation of the Son in human flesh, thus denying the incarnation does not possess God in a saving relationship.[305]

Leon Morris

Leon Morris (1914-2006), Principal of Ridley College, Melbourne, and Canon of St. Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne, paraphrases:

> So if a man does not bring this doctrine (i.e., the doctrine that Christ is God incarnate) he is not to be received.[306]

George Johnston

Another scholarly witness in favor of the *objective genitive* is George Johnston, Principal of United Theological College and Professor of New Testament Studies at McGill Univ., Montreal. He, too, leaves no

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[303]Rudolph Bultmann, *A Commentary on the Johannine Epistles, Hermeneia Series* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 113.

[304]David Smith, "The Epistles of John," in *The Expositor's Greek New Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 202.

[305]Kenneth S. Wuest, *In These Last Days: Studies in the Greek Text of II Peter, I, II, III John and Jude***,** Wuest's Word Studies Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 206.

[306]Leon Morris, "2 John," in *The New Bible Commentary: Revised*, ed. D. Guthrie and J. A. Motyer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 1272.

doubt that the "doctrine of Christ" must refer to the incarnation. Johnson calls attention to 2 John 7 as commentary on 2 John 9. He concludes from the context that "doctrine of Christ" must be objective genitive. We should pay attention to his brief comments:

> The doctrine of Christ" must refer to the point in dispute at 7 [verse] and in 1 John; so the genitive is objective.[307]

Lehman Strauss

Lehman Strauss (1911-1986) also interprets 2 John 9 as *objective genitive*:

> Twice in this one verse we read the phrase "the doctrine of Christ." The word *doctrine* (Greek, *didachē*) means "teaching." John is not referring here merely to those doctrines which Christ taught, but rather teaching with reference to Christ, teaching which recognizes Jesus as the Messiah and Saviour. . . . In view here [2 John 10-11] are the false teachers who come with false teachings. They do not believe nor teach the true doctrine, namely, that Christ is God manifest in flesh. These teachers are not Christians at all. They are not true witnesses of Jehovah; they are actually the devil's witnesses.[308]

Donald Burdick

Donald Burdick (b.1917), in keeping with his comments on 1 John 2: 24, explains:

> John contrasts the one who goes beyond and the one who remains "in the doctrine of Christ" in verse 9. This doctrine is not teaching which comes from Christ; instead it is the teaching concerning Christ's incarnation which John has already pointed out in verse 7.[309]

E. M. Blaiklock

In concluding the *objective genitive* scholarship, one more scholar is in order to again set forth the context of 2 John 9. Edward Musgrave Blaiklock (1903-1983) is perfectly correct, as it appears from the context, when he says:

> A Jesus any less than God in flesh appearing cannot be a Saviour. Any doctrine which takes away from Christ's full deity is no doctrine at all. It is antichristian, destructive, ruinous. . . . The "teaching of Christ" is the teaching which stresses the fact that Christ was God's revelation of Himself, the full and final message to man. Any other version of Christ, any distortion of the record, loses not only the Christ John had known but loses God too. Christ was the way to the Father. Lose one and the other is lost. Such warning is timeless.[310]

Even though several eminent scholars have been quoted here, it should be remarked that a nose count is not really worth anything except to illustrate the popularity or respectability of a view. Often one author accepts a plausible-sounding view presented by others without really making a meticulous study of the matter. No one person has the opportunity to study every issue with complete thoroughness. Ultimately, only the context matters, not what various people think. In fairness to those who espouse the *subjective genitive* (teachings of Christ), it is necessary to also cite scholars of equal scholarship that postulate that the *doctrine of Christ* is the teaching by Christ (subjective), not the teaching about Christ (objective).

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[307]G. Johnson, "I, II, III John," in Matthew Black and H. H. Rowley, ed., *Peake's Commentary on the Bible* (London and Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1967), 1039.

[308]Lehman Strauss, *The Epistles of John* (Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1972), 153, 154.

[309]Donald W. Burdick, *The Epistles of John* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1970), 107.

[310]E. M. Blaiklock, *Letters to Children of Light: Commentary on First, Second & Third John* (Glendale, California: Regal Books, 1975), 117, 118.

SCHOLARSHIP: SUBJECTIVE GENITIVE

John R. W. Stott

The *subjective genitive* concept is fully worked out by John Stott (1921-2011) in his excellent commentary on the Epistles of John. He disagrees with Smith, as cited above, that the genitive should be interpreted as *objective genitive* and not as a *subjective genitive*:

> At first sight this phrase, literally 'doctrine of the Christ' (NEB), might be taken as meaning 'the teaching which recognizes Jesus as the Christ' (Smith), and this would suit the context well. But the 'usage of the N. T.' (Westcott, Brooke) requires that the genitive be interpreted not as objective, 'the teaching about Christ', but as subjective, 'Christ's teaching'. This no doubt includes what Christ continued to teach through the apostles (cf. Acts i. 1; Col. Iii. 16; Heb. Ii. 3). Such authoritative apostolic doctrine is equivalent to what in his First Epistle John called 'what you heard from the beginning' (ii. 24, RSV; cf. Ii. 7, iii. 11; Jn. Viii. 31; 2 Tim. Iii. 14 and 2 Jn. 5, 6).[311]

Kenneth Grayston

Kenneth Grayston (1914-2005), Methodist preacher and New Testament scholar, objects to the *objective genitive* in his commentary on the Johannine epistles:

> The misleading views of the **deceivers** had little to do with Docetism: their refusal, as the elder makes plain, consisted of abandoning the teaching of Christ (*didachē tou Christou*). RSV and NEB, but not GNB, JB, and NIV, translate didach by **doctrine**, which in modern usage inevitably suggest a formulated Christology and implies an objective genitive (teaching about Christ). But the genitive could equally be subjective (teaching given by Christ), referring to Christ's teaching about love both by his words and his actions.[312]

A. T. Robertson

Archibald Thomas Robertson (1863-1934), the greatest Greek scholar in America, also advances the idea that the "doctrine of Christ" (subjective) is the teaching that Christ taught:

> Not the teaching about Christ, but that of Christ which is the standard of Christian teaching as the walk of Christ is the standard for the Christian's walk (I John 2:6).[313]

Marvin R. Vincent

Marvin Richardson Vincent (1834-1922), also a reputable scholar, postulates the "doctrine of Christ" as *subjective genitive:*

> Not the teaching *concerning* Christ, but the teaching of Christ Himself and of His apostles. See Heb. Ii. 3. So according to New Testament usage. See John xviii. 19; Acts ii. 12; Apoc. Ii. 14, 15.[314]

CHURCHES OF CHRIST: SUBJECTIVE GENITIVE

Many within the Churches of Christ apply a very unique interpretation to 2 John 9. Generally, the "doctrine of Christ" is associated with a particular brand of orthodoxy. Almost all major divisions within the

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[311]John R. W. Stott, *The Epistles of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 212.

[312]Kenneth Grayston, *The Johannine Epistles*, The New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 154.

[313]A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament: General Epistles and Revelation of John*, vol., 6 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1933), 254.

[314]Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol., 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 396.

Churches of Christ cite this verse as their verse. To some Christians, the "doctrine of Christ" is associated with one-cup, non-Sunday school, instrumental music, divorce and remarriage, wine, grape juice, bread breaking, bread pinching, orphan homes, Bible colleges, and so on. Seldom do the journals (Churches of Christ) on 2 John 9 ever refer to the "doctrine of Christ" as "loving one another" or adhering to the teachings of Christ as expounded in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7).[315] A few citations from some of the Church of Christ journals or lectureships should illustrate this illegal utilization of 2 John 9. To illustrate, it is necessary to cite a few examples of godly men to set forth the presupposition.

J. Noel Meredith

In The Sixth Annual Denton Lectures (November 8-12, 1987), Noel Meredith delivered a lecture on "False Teachers and How to Deal with Them (2 John 7-13)." In this lecture he identifies, among other things, the employment of instrumental music in the so-called assembly as tantamount to not abiding in the "doctrine of Christ." He writes,

> The kind of sin under consideration (verse 9) here is one in which one is progressing beyond the doctrine of Christ; he does not abide in the doctrine of Christ. When division arose in the church over the use of instrumental music in worship, those who used it styled themselves as "progressives" and they stigmatized those who adhered to the original mode of worship—singing God's praise unaccompanied (Eph. 5:19)—as "non-progressives." There is a very definite fitness in these terms. Instrumental music was not commanded by Christ, no apostle ever sanctioned it, no New Testament writer ever authorized it, and no apostolic church ever practiced it. To use instrumental music in worship is indeed to be "progressive"—to "progress" beyond the things which are written.[316]

C. A. Smith

Smith, one-cup and non-Sunday school, complains of a visit to one of the "brotherhood meeting houses" in which "brothers and sisters in Christ put on a concert."[317] He complained that one would see the same thing if one attended "the Stamps Quartet, Statesman Quartet, Imperials and etc., (sic) with showmanship, rousing applause, hollering and other gestures."[318] He goes on to say that this did not occur during a "Worship Service," but he continues, "If you can use the church buildings for such carryings on, what would be wrong in our using our buildings for a 'Ladies Lectureship.' 'A Style Show,' or 'A Political Rally?'[319] How does he justify condemnation of the "Sunday afternoon" singing?" Listen to his proof text:

> Unless someone shows me I am wrong. I cannot bid "God speed" to such for I would be guilty of endorsing that which I believe is a dangerous practice. (II John 9-11), and that would make me a partaker in their evil deeds. As I have heard brother Lynwood Smith say, several times: "I am Church of Christ to the core, and I hope that it shows in every area of my walk for the Lord." Nobody likes good singing better than I do, but let us please respect God's Word, the church, our brethren and ourselves and use it to glory and praise God.[320]

We wonder how praising God in song can be classified as "evil deeds." To sing in a quartet is a "dangerous practice," according to Smith. Is 2 John 9 the Scripture that condemns quartet singing in a church building? Is this what John is saying?

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[315]I am not saying that Christians who apply 2 John 9 to other Christians that disagree with them over doctrinal matters would not advance the teaching that we should live pure lives. All I am saying is that this concept of ethical teaching is not generally stated in their expositions of this much abused text.

[316]J. Noel Meredith, "False Teachers and How to Deal with Them," in *Studies in 1, 2, 3 John***,** Sixth Annual Denton Lectures, Dub McClish, ed. (Denton Texas: Valid Publications, 1987), 270.

[317]C. A. Smith, "Special Music," *Old Paths Advocate* LXVV, no. 3 (March 1996): 4, 5.

[318]Ibid., 5.

[319]Ibid.

[320]Ibid. Even though this citation is found in footnote 4, I have recited this quotation in order to emphasize the mindset of this sincere believer.

Carl M. Johnson

Johnson, another one-cup and non-Sunday school believer, calls attention to unity meetings that Carl Ketcherside (1908-1989) and others conducted. He erroneously states that "Ketcherside argued that there are no doctrines other than the teachings concerning the person of Christ (that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah) that are serious enough to justify a break in fellowship among believers."[321] Since Ketcherside sought to recapture the spirit of unity for which Jesus prayed, Johnson justifies his separation from Ketcherside through his citation of 2 John 9:

> The Apostle John warns, "Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son" (2 John 9). In an effort to harmonize his own position with John's words, Ketcherside argued that the expression "doctrine of Christ" does not refer to all that Jesus taught personally and through His apostles, but it refers to teaching about the nature, or the deity of Christ only. By limiting the meaning of "doctrine of Christ" in 2 John to teaching about the deity of Christ, Ketcherside and his supporters could extend open fellowship to all "sincere believers" regardless of their doctrine and practice.[322]

Johnson assumes that John is talking about what Johnson believes, but is this the case? What is the context for 2 John 9?

INSTRUCTIVE PARALLEL OF 1 JOHN 2:22-23 AND 2 JOHN 9

When we are in doubt about the correct interpretation of a passage of Scripture that is obscure in our minds, we should search for parallel constructions to assist us in correctly handling the Word of Truth. Illumination is often found when we compare Scripture with Scripture. A cardinal rule of explanation is that the *obscure* should be interpreted in the light of the *clear*, never the reverse. The interpreter is bound to consider how the subject lay in the mind of the author and to point out the exact ideas and sentiments intended. To illustrate the above principles of exposition, we should place 1 John 2:22-23 in parallel columns with 2 John 9. First John 2:22-23 is an instructive parallel to 2 John 9. I have place the following thought patterns in parallel lines:

1 John 2:22-23	**2 John 9**
Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist	Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ
—he denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son	
has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son	Does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching
has the Father also.	Has both the Father and the Son.

These two citations constitute a real parallel, that is to say, a parallel of ideas. The Word of God is an organic unity of which all parts are mutually related and are subservient to the whole of God's Revelation. The Bible is its own best interpreter. From the parallel passages, one can sense that 2 John 9 is a restatement of 1 John 2:22-23. The denial that Jesus is the Christ is nothing more or less than a denial of God. To make 2 John 9

[321]Carl M. Johnson, "Trojan Horse in the Church," *Old Paths Advocate* LXX, No. 2 (February 1996): 1.
[322]Ibid., 1.

apply to instrumental music, individual communion cups, Sunday school, handclapping, raising hands, taking money out of the church treasury to assist individuals who are not Christians, and so on, is to tear this Scripture out of its context.

GNOSTICISM

If we are to interpret "doctrine of Christ" (KJV) or "teaching of Christ" (NIV) correctly, we must look to the context and to its background. From the immediate context as well as the remote context (the book itself), it is apparent that John wrote to combat the errors of Gnosticism.[323] The Gnostics were denying the Incarnation. They insisted that Christ never had a flesh-and-blood, physical, human body. They also taught that spirit alone is good and matter alone is utterly evil. Given that point of view, then, any real Incarnation is impossible.

John's concern with Gnosticism is especially seen in the following verses:

2 John 7	**1 John 4:1-3**
Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.	Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

The Gnostics, who denied Christ having come in the flesh, were not to be received by Christians: "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching (**ταύτην τὴν διδαχὴν οὐ φέρει**, *tautēn tēn didachēn ou pherei*, 'brings not this teaching'), do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work" (2 John 10-11). Earlier, as cited above, John warns: "Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist" (2 John 7). These two Scriptures shed light on verse 9: "Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ (**διδαχῇ τοῦ Χριστοῦ**, *didachē tou Christou*) does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son."

CONCLUSION

A correct interpretation of 2 John 9 does not advocate looseness in adhering to the teachings of Christ as advanced in the Sermon on the Mount. Both epistles of John address holiness as characteristic of every believer. The teachings that Jesus commanded in the great commission relate to the Sermon on the Mount and are summed up in this command: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." The "teaching of Christ" in 2 John 9 does not refer to the Sermon on the Mount, but rather, to the teaching about Christ's humanity (Incarnation). Christians should not tear 2 John 9 out of its context, and, then, employ this passage as a meat cleaver to hack to

[323]For a thorough analysis of "Gnosticism," see William Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977; originally published in 1958), 3-20.

death all those who disagree with their party cry for their own prevailing beliefs, which originates out of their own "interpretive community."[324]

The next Chapter in this study calls for an examination of old texts through new eyes in examining the role of women within the Christian community. Chapter 12 goes against the traditional interpretation that women are second-rate citizens in the Kingdom of God. This Chapter seeks to unravel the role that women are to have in the Great Commission issued by Jesus. We wonder why Jesus would have excluded about seventy-five percent of His work force in the proclamation of the Good News of God's way of salvation by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ upon Calvary. Special attention is given to the role women played in the Great Commission as found in Luke 24. This chapter seeks to understand the role women participated in the spread of the Gospel in the first century. Just a casual reading of this chapter reveals that the traditional teachings concerning women are not in harmony with the Word of God.

[324]Interpretive communities are composed of members who share a particular reading "strategy," or a "set of community assumptions." See M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 6th ed . (New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1993), 271. See also Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980).

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The Role of Women in the Great Commission

> The understanding of a text involves the correct mental perception of a text's meaning. Another way of saying this is that understanding involves a correct grasp of the pattern of meaning that the author willed, each individual who understands the meaning will have the same mental grasp of the author's pattern of meaning. Some understandings may be more complete than others because of a greater perception of the various implications involved, but, if an understanding is correct, it must have the same mental grasp of the author's meaning as any other understanding. Thus, although one person's understanding of meaning may be greater or more exhaustive than another's (because of a greater awareness of the various implications involved), every correct mental grasp of the author's meaning, or understanding, will be the same.[325]

Has God limited the proclamation of His mystery to the male species? The Christian community, as a whole, limits the participation of women in the Christian community. Did God intend that both men and women take part in the sharing of the mystery that had been hidden from ages past? The mystery, as defined by Paul, is Christ in us, the hope of glory. We cannot help but wonder why God would decrease His work force by at least seventy-five percent in the proclamation of the Good News. In view of the fact that this study is about the role women are to play in the Great Commission, which is the sharing of the "Mystery" of God, which is Christ, we should briefly reread Ephesians 1:9 concerning the "mystery of His will" in which He will "bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ" (1:10).

In essence, we can say that the "mystery of His will" is that the Gospel (justification through faith in His Son) is available to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews. In Jesus, God revealed that His love, His concern, His grace, and His mercy were for all humanity, not just Jews. Prior to the coming of Jesus, humanity lived in a divided world. A part of the "mystery of His will" centered on demolishing the wall of hostility that separated Jew from Gentile. Jesus came into the world to wipe out division between the Jew and the Gentile (2:11-22) through His own body upon the Tree (2:16).

The prepositional phrase "in Christ" (**ἐν Χριστῷ**, *en Christō*) captures the very core of unity. "In Christ" occurs eighty-six times in the Pauline epistles. Paul, fourteen times in the Book of Ephesians, uses this phrase to capture the foundation of this phenomenon of unity created by God.[326] This phrase is a dynamic unity of celestial (heavenly) and terrestrial (earthly) dimensions. Paul expresses this truth with great clarity:

> And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, [10] to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. (Ephesians 1:9-10)

If we understand the "mystery of God's administration of grace," this awareness should assist us in seeking to bring about unity within the Christian community, a community that is shattered into many sectarian

[325]Robert H. Stein, *A Basic guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 49.
[326]Ephesians 1:1, 3, 9, 12, 13, 20; 2:6, 7, 10, 13; 3:6, 11, 21; 4:32

camps. A consciousness of the *mystery* of salvation puts us on equal footing—Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female. The heart of this unity is that there is "one body" (2:16; 3:6; 4:4, 4:25). Since there is only "one body," we can say that this truth ("one body") is the means whereby Christ brings unity to all the warring factions (various divisions) within the Christian community. This "one body" brings unity to all the various races (every nation). This "one body" also establishes equality between men and women. Paul grabs hold of these various issues as he seeks unity among the hostile forces at work to disrupt the plan of God for the salvation of all peoples. Listen to Paul as he writes to the Galatians: "There is neither **Jew nor Greek**, **slave nor free**, **male nor female**, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

A proper concept of the phrase "in Christ" should bring about harmony among God's people. We are alienated into countless argumentative cliques over dogma. We are not speaking to one another over the race issue—blacks and whites. We are at odds over the role of women in the Christian community. We are on bad terms over the proper procedure concerning the so-called five acts of worship to be performed on Sunday morning during a so-called worship service. Since the Jew and Gentile, as well as the slave and free, are no longer problems for the church, perhaps, a few comments are in order to set the stage for the dismantling of other long-held traditions concerning the role of women in ministry and the dismantling of another long-held tradition about each distinctive group within the Churches of Christ as embodying the whole truth and nothing but the truth. We still fight like cats-and-dogs over the least infraction of our cherished beliefs, which destroys the unity of the "one body" for which our Lord prayed (John 17).

As we reflect upon the *mystery* of salvation (a salvation provided by God), we are immediately confronted with the role that women play within the Christian community created by God. Is she or is she not to preach the Gospel? Can she give testimony to the world concerning the coming of Jesus into the world as Savior? Can she give her testimony about salvation in the assembly? Can she teach in the presence of men? These are questions that this study will briefly address. Since this study is about the role women play in the scheme of redemption, it is appropriate to discuss who can proclaim the Gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:17). Is the Great Commission limited to the Eleven in Mark, Luke, and John? Or does the Great Commission include all the disciples of Jesus—both men and women?

THE ROLE OF WOMEN AND CHURCH DIVISION

One of the most controversial issues within the Christian community is the proper role of women within the Christian gatherings—to speak or not to speak in the assembly. Many Christians still cite 1 Timothy 2:9-15 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 without consulting the context of these two famous passages.[327] The traditional view contradicts other clear passages. Since the Word of God does not contradict itself, then we must seek to understand the two controversial texts, as cited above, in light of their context. Whatever these passages are teaching, we know that the traditional interpretation is not correct. The Kroegers correctly point out: "It is necessary to compare Scripture with Scripture to find the current meaning. We must consider *all* that the Bible has to say about the activities of women committed to God's will."[328] Many cite these two pericopes, or sections, without reference to the context.[329] The role of women in the church has driven a wedge into the body of Christ. Do we have a right to keep alive the denunciation of women in ministry in the same way that the church employed the Scriptures to justify slavery in the nineteenth century?

In the first century church, Christians maintained diversified viewpoints. Yet, their differences were not to divide the body of Christ. Whether we employ the expression *churches of* Christ (Romans 16:16) or the

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[327]For a thorough investigation of 1 Timothy 2:9-15, see Richard Clark Kroeger and Catherine Clark Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman: Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in Light of Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992); also see Sharon Hodgin Gritz, *Paul, Women Teachers, and The Mother Goddess at Ephesus: A Study of 1 Timothy 2:9-15 in Light of The Religious and Cultural Milieu of The First Century* (New York: University Press of America, 1991).

[328]Ibid., 13.

[329]Since this essay is not designed to analyze the role of women in the church, this paper will only call attention to the more positive elements that many Christians overlook. In a forthcoming study, I will do an analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 in order to assist Christians in a proper understanding of these two most controversial texts.

expression *churches of the* Gentiles (16:4), as found in Romans 16, still there is just "one body" (Ephesians 4:4).[330] There was not "one body" for the meat eaters and "another body" for the non-meat eaters (Romans 14:1-4).[331] There was not "one body" for the Sabbath keepers and "another body" for the non-Sabbath keepers (14:5-8). There was not "one body" for the Blacks and "another body" for the Whites (Revelation 7:9-10). There was not "one body" for the Jews and "another body" for the Gentiles (Ephesians 2:14-18). There was not "one body" for the males and "another body" for the females (Galatians 3:26-29). The prophet Joel (835 BC) wrote about the Messianic Age in which he stated that God's Spirit would be poured out on "all people," which includes females as well as males:

> I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. [29] Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. (Joel 2:28-29)

"Both men and women" were active in the ministry of Jesus as well as in the ministry of the apostles. In spite of what Joel wrote, still many churches will not allow women to **speak** in their assemblies or pray in their assemblies or **request songs** in their assemblies. In fact, some Christians will not allow women to give thanks for food in the presence of men, even in the home. Also, some advance the notion that women should not conduct private Bible studies on the off chance a man might drop in. Recently, I read two essays in which the writers (both males) took the position that women could not write about Christianity and place their essays on the Internet.[332] Why? According to these two preachers, the writer (female) of the essay would violate 1 Corinthians 14:34-35.[333] Yet, in chapter eleven of First Corinthians, Paul spoke of women praying and prophesying in the assembly (11:5). Whatever 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 is saying, it cannot contradict 1 Corinthians 11:5.[334] Luke begins his Book of Acts with the Apostles as well as the women praying together, along with the brothers of Jesus. Luke writes:

> Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk [a] from the city. [13] When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James.

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[330]The expression *churches of Christ* is no more the name of the church than the expression *churches of the Gentiles.*

[331]Even though some of the Christians were right and others were wrong, still this misunderstanding was not sufficient to disrupt the unity of the body of Christ.

[332]Greg Gay, "The Internet – 4," *Old Paths Advocate* 74, no. 1 (January 2000): 3-5. Greg writes:

> *Is a woman posting a message on a web page publicly speaking?* The posting of messages on a site for the purpose of discussing the meaning of scriptures (sic) results in the blurring of men and women's roles in teaching. Each media must be carefully examined so we do not violate Biblical principles. A woman posting an opinion about a passage of scripture (sic) on a web site that any and all can access appears to be doing public speaking to me. (pp. 4, 5)

[333]See also Alan Bonifay, "WWW.Parents/Leaders Beware," *Old Paths Advocate* LXXIV, no 4 (April 2000): 3-5, where he warns about private Bible studies and women posting essays on the Internet. He writes:

> Just how many people that might entail is open to some discussion but it is certainly less than fifty – in fact, it is probably considerably less than twenty. What that means is that when wives and daughters contribute comments to a web page forum potentially open to hundreds, if not thousands, of contributors from all over the world they are violating 1 Timothy 2:11-12 (p. 4).

[334]Look for a forthcoming study in which I will deal with 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 in context as well as 1 Timothy 2:9-15. The traditional interpretations of these two Scripture citations contradict clear passages that allow women to participate in Christian ministry, even in the assembly. It appears, so it seems to me, that 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 relates to what the Judaizers were saying, not Paul. I could not find one statement in the Old Testament where women were told to keep silent or could not take a position of leadership. The "law" relates to the traditions of the Jews, not to the Old Testament Scriptures. Also, one must interpret 1 Timothy in its context along with 2 Timothy and Titus if one expects to understand what Paul had reference to.

a That is, about 3 | 4 mile (about 1,100 meters)

[14]They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. (Acts 1:12-14)

Yes, even in the presence of the Apostles and the brothers of Jesus, one discovers that the women—even the mother of Jesus—were praying. Also, Luke records that Philip the evangelist had four daughters who prophesied (21:9). Where did they prophesy? Did they prophecy out in the cornfield to a bunch of corn stalks? Or did they prophesy to both men and women? Earlier, in his history of the Christian movement, Luke mentions the wife (Priscilla) of Aquila who participated in teaching Apollos "the way of God more adequately" (18:26).[335] Priscilla is also listed in the "hall of fame" in Romans 16 (verse 3). Eleven women are named in this chapter. Of the four names associated with the church of Philippi, three were women—Euodia and Syntyche (Philippians 4:2-3) and Lydia (Acts 16:11-15) and one a man (Clement—Philippians 4:3). Euodia and Syntyche contended (labored) with Paul at his side "in the Gospel" (4:3). Even at Thyatira (one of the seven churches of Asia Minor), the church had a woman teaching (Revelation 2:18-29). Listen to what Jesus said about this woman who calls herself a prophetess:

Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. [21] I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. [22] So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. [23] I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds. [24] Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you). [2:20-24]

God did not condemn her (Jezebel) for teaching, but rather, He condemned her for what she was teaching—"sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols" (2:20). Jezebel was teaching Gnostic philosophy. She had in essence become a Gnostic leader. Once more, God gave "her time to repent of her immorality, but she was unwilling." If it had been wrong for her to teach, we wonder why God did not say something about that. This testimony is also inferred evidence that women did take a public role in the preaching and teaching of God's Word, otherwise she would not have been accepted as a public figure within the Christian community.

In the bestowal of the Spirit upon the Church, there was no distinction of sex. Acts 2:1-4 seems to include the women mentioned in Acts 1:12-14. If so, this accounts for Peter's citation of Joel 2 in order to give validity to the unusual circumstances on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-21). The women disciples of Jesus had prepared the way for what happened on the Day of Pentecost. The right and duty of women to co-operate with men in carrying out the Great Commission cannot be questioned. All Christians are ministers of God. All believers, according to Paul, are ministers of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:17-6:2). If the traditional view concerning women is correct, we wonder why God would disenfranchise approximately three fourths, or at least one half, of His disciples from proclaiming the Good News about God's Way of salvation "in" and "through" Jesus. Since all Christians are to rejoice in the *how* of salvation, it is appropriate to briefly discuss those who have been disenfranchised from telling the *how* of salvation in any public manner, especially to men. This brief detour of the *how* and *why* of salvation focuses on an examination of Luke 24 to illustrate that the women were told to be witnesses as well as the men concerning the *how* of salvation.

[335]Priscilla is mentioned, along with her husband, seven times in the New Testament (Acts 18:2, 18, 19, 26; Romans 16:3; 1 Corinthians 16:19; and 2 Timothy 4:19). Out of the seven listings, Priscilla's name occurs first in five of the seven listings.

Women Included in the Great Commission

Luke 24

Acts 1 and 2 are a continuation of Luke 24. If we wish to understand chapters one and two of Acts, we need to reread carefully Luke 24. Just a casual reading reveals that the women were included in the "you are witnesses of these things" (24:48). On the morning of the resurrection, Luke informs Theophilus (see Acts 1:1) that the "women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb" (Luke 24:1). Upon their arrival, they discovered that the stone had been rolled away (24:2). While wondering about this event, Luke says, "In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground" (24:5). Two men stood by these women in clothing that "gleamed like lightning" (24:4). These two individuals reminded these women that Jesus had foretold this event about the resurrection to them while He was in Galilee (24:6-8).

Luke gives the names of some of these women, but not all: "It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles" (24:10). After talking with the two men, they returned to the city to tell the "Eleven" and "all the others" (24:9) that Jesus was raised. Luke reports to Theophilus that after the women met with the Apostles, and the others, that on the same day, two of those present left and headed for a "village called Emmaus," about seven miles from Jerusalem (24:13). Luke informs Theophilus that Jesus suddenly appeared to these two men as they were discussing the events that had just transpired in Jerusalem about the crucifixion (24:13-32). During the course of the conversation, these two disciples related to the stranger (Jesus) what had been reported to them by the women who had gone earlier to the tomb (24:22-24).

Following this encounter with Jesus, Luke reports: "They got up and returned once more to Jerusalem" (24:33a) For a second time, we observe the gathering of possibly the one hundred and twenty mentioned in Acts 1. "There they found the Eleven and those with them assembled together" (24:33b), which included the women. Yet again, Jesus appears in their presence (24:36) as he had previously appeared before the women at the Resurrection and the two men whom Jesus had talked on the way to Emmaus. Just as Jesus had earlier unfolded the Scriptures to these men, Jesus again, unfolds the meaning of the Old Testament Scriptures concerning His sufferings and death and resurrection (24:45-47). After this revelation of the Messianic prophecies concerning Himself, He says to the Eleven and to the others, "You are witnesses of these things. [49] I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (24:48-49).

This promise—outpouring of the Holy Spirit—is generally limited to the Twelve on the Day of Pentecost. But this promise was to be poured out on both men and women, not just the Apostles. According to Joel, the promise of the Father was to be poured out on both men and women. Luke corroborates the fulfillment of Joel's Messianic prophecy (Acts 2). Individuals who wish to reach certain doctrinal conclusions by assimilating their presuppositions and their attitudes toward women sterilize this truth—both men and women were present and were to receive the Holy Spirit (Joel 2).

Proper biblical hermeneutics demand that every interpreter look at the context. Our failure to appreciate the context will lead us to give undue acquiescence to an excessively biased point of view. According to the context of Luke 24, the women were also present among those in attendance with the Eleven. The context of Luke 24 reveals that the women, along with the men, were to be "witnesses of these things" and "clothed with power upon high" (24:48-49). The Great Commission was not/is not limited to the male species.

One Hundred and Twenty: Men and Women

Acts 1

We should read the first two chapters of Acts in conjunction with the last chapter of Luke in order to follow the continuity of Luke's comments in Acts 1 and 2. Luke 24 concludes his Gospel with two outstanding statements—(1) "witness of these things" and (2) "clothed with power upon high." Just a casual reading of the

Gospel accounts reveals a revolutionary doctrine of liberation for women—a liberation from degradation and inferiority. As stated above, in Acts 1, Luke records the presence of the Eleven in an upper room, along with "the women and Mary the mother of Jesus," which also included the brothers of Jesus (1:12-14).

This number totaled one hundred and twenty (1:15). The significant fact is, as stated above, that the women prayed alongside of the apostles and the others: "They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers" (1:14). This Scripture runs contrary to the practice of many Christians today. Not only did the women pray in this gathering of the one hundred and twenty, but they also took part in casting lots in the choosing of Mathias (1:22-26). There is no indication, from the context, that this selection process (casting lots) was limited only to the men.

Yet again, some repetition is necessary for us to follow the logical sequence of events in order to show conclusively that the women were present in the events that transpired following the resurrection of Jesus (Luke 24:36-49). Hopefully, repetition may be pardoned here, for the minds of many Christians are so leavened by the traditions of the church Fathers that vital truths are difficult to see. Since truth is so often the projection of the particular views of the powerful, it is necessary to go back to the Scriptures and reread with freshness. In other words, the traditions of the church make it difficult, if not impossible, to read the Bible afresh.

Once more, we cannot read this unit of Scripture (23:47-49) without a consciousness of two things: (**1**) the witnesses included women, and (**2**) the women who followed Jesus from Galilee were witnesses. Pay attention to Luke, as cited above, as he writes: "The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it" (23:55). The phrase "from Galilee" flashes like neon lights alongside the mention of "women." Why? Were they to witness concerning Jesus? As Luke continues his scenario, he sets forth the prominence of the women's role following the Resurrection. Remember, following the burial of Jesus, **the women** took spices to the tomb (24:1).

They found the stone rolled away and entered the tomb (24:2). Whereupon, they were frightened, and Luke says, "**the women** bowed down" (24:5). The two men questioned them about why they were looking for the living among the dead (24:5). Again, we observe the use of the word ***Galilee*** in the course of the conversation by the two men: "He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you **in Galilee**" (24:6). It was not just the Apostles that Jesus told about His impending death while in Galilee—women were included. The expressions ***from Galilee*** and ***in Galilee*** are important phrases in trying to ascertain whether or not women were included in the command to witness to others about the *how* of salvation.

Can we in our wildest imagination edit out the women from "those with them"? The women play a major role in this section of Scripture (see also Acts 1:12-15). Jesus appears to His disciples. Should we limit the word *disciple* only to the male species? Surely not! There is no evidence to uphold that the word *disciple* refers only to males. Suddenly Jesus stood among them (both men and women). Still there was unbelief on the part of the disciples. He told them to look at His hands and His feet in order to prove that He was not a ghost, for a ghost does not have flesh and bones (24:37-41).

After that, He opened their minds so they could understand what the prophets had earlier spoken of (24:47). He then informed those present (both men and women) that they were to be "witnesses of all these things" (24:48). At that time, Jesus let them know that He would send the promise of His Father upon each of them (24:40). But they were instructed to wait in Jerusalem until they were clothed with this power from on high (24:49). Did the Eleven and the other disciples, which included women, understand that they were all to wait in Jerusalem for this outpouring of God's Spirit upon both men and women? Yes! As stated above, the first chapter of Acts reveals that there were one hundred and twenty who were gathered in Jerusalem waiting for the events to transpire (Acts 1:15).

Once more, if the women were not included, we wonder why Peter did not say so. In fact, he cited the prophet Joel to show that Joel had previously foretold the phenomenon that they were now witnessing:

> Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. [15]These men (οὗτοι Joutoi) are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! [16]No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: [17] 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old

men will dream dreams. [18] Even on my servants, **both** men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. [19] I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. [20]The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. [21] And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'"[a] (Joel 2:14-21)

In Acts 2:1, Luke writes: "When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place." On the Day of Pentecost, the outpouring of the Spirit is generally limited to the Twelve among many interpreters of the Word, but, according to Peter, the outpouring of the Spirit was upon the one hundred and twenty:

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. [2] Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. [3] They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. [4] All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues [a] as the Spirit enabled them. (Acts 2:1-4)

Women Who Followed Jesus from Galilee

Acts 13:31

In just a casual reading of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we do not, under normal circumstances, catch a glimpse of the importance of this phrase in analyzing the role of women in the proclamation of God's Good News. The phrase "**from Galilee**" plays a significant role in our interpretation of the role of women in Christian ministry. For example, an angel of God uses this phrase "in Galilee" in calling attention to their (the women) travels with Jesus (Luke 24:6). Another example is found in the Book of Mark. As Jesus hung suspended between heaven and earth, Mark gives an insightful note concerning the women who had followed Jesus "**from Galilee**." Luke specifically mentions three women at the crucifixion by name, but he does not stop there. He also says that in addition to these three there were "many other women." What is significant about all of this is what Mark says about where these women came from:

Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. [41] **In Galilee** these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there. (Mark 15:40-41)

Once more, the geographical name "Galilee" plays a major role in understanding the role of women in Christian ministry. Matthew, too, gives information about these women who came from Galilee:

Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus **from Galilee** to care for his needs. [56] Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's sons. (Matthew 27:55-56)

Again, this information about women following Jesus "**from Galilee**" is extremely important. Not only did Mark and Matthew call attention to this devotion among the women, but Luke also details this same information. Listen to Luke as he writes: "The women who had come with Jesus **from Galilee** followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it" (Luke 23:55). In the reading of Mark and Matthew, one name stands out in BOLD—Mary Magdalene. Following Luke's statement about the women "**from Galilee**," he then proceeds to list the names of some of these women:

When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. [10] It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. [11] But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. (24:9-11)

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a Joel 2:28-32

a Or *languages*; also in verse 11

This information from Mark, Matthew, and Luke, along with the full context, leads us to realize that the Great Commission was not given only to the Eleven, but to all those present—both men and women. If we wish to understand the ones to whom this commission was given, we must read and reread the entire context for contextual understanding. An understanding of the full text sheds light on the role women were/are to play in the proclamation of God's Good News to a lost and dying world. The women who discovered the empty tomb returned to tell the Apostles what had transpired (Luke 24:9). Yet, the Apostles refused to believe, as Luke says, "nonsense" (24:11).

Once more, repetition is necessary in order to drive home the point that women did share in ministry in the early church and to keep continuity in the analysis of Luke 24 with reference to the women's presence with the apostles and others. On this same day, Luke records two of His disciples on the road going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem (24:13).[336] On this road, Jesus suddenly appeared to these two men and struck up a conversation. In the course of the conversation, these men related what the women had said about the empty tomb and that Jesus was alive (24:22-24). It was then that Jesus rebukes them for their lack of faith (24:25). Jesus then explained to them what the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms had said about Him (24:27).

After Jesus went to their home and broke bread and gave to them, Luke says that their eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus (24:30-31). As we seek to unravel the part that the women played in this part of God's announcement of the Resurrected Christ, we should always be conscious that this background is necessary in order to follow the logical sequence of what is about to follow. Following this episode with Jesus, Luke writes: "They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found **the Eleven** and **those with them**, assembled together" (24:33). They found not only "the Eleven," but also "those with them." These two men related their stories, and while they were speaking, the Lord Jesus "stood **among them**" (24:36). He showed them His hands and His feet (24:39). A conversation erupted between Jesus and His disciples; it was at this point that Luke writes:

> Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. [46] He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, [47] and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. [48] You are witnesses of these things. [49] I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." (24:45-49)

Both men and women were present! Jesus informed His disciples—both men and women—that repentance and forgiveness of sins would be preached in His name to all nations. Jesus did not limit this commission just to the male species, but rather he issued this statement to all the disciples present—"You are witnesses" (24:33). Also, in verse 48, Jesus says, "You are witnesses of these things." All the disciples—both men and women—were to wait in Jerusalem until they received the promise from on high. Luke gives the fulfillment of this "promise from on high" in Acts 2.

While they were assembled, the one hundred and twenty cast lots for the selection of one to take the place of Judas (1:23-26). Luke writes: "Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles" (1:26). The very next verse reads: "When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place" (2:1). On this occasion Luke reports:

> Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. [3] They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. [4] All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues [a] as the Spirit enabled them. (2:2-4)

As stated above, sometimes repetition is necessary in order to uproot long-held traditions. There are three laws of learning that everyone should commit to memory: REPETITION, REPETITION, and

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[336]Some repetition is necessary in order to keep continuity in the development of the role women played in the proclamation of the Good News.

a Or *languages*; also in verse 11

REPETITION. If this event did not occur upon both men and women (one hundred and twenty), we still wonder why Peter cited the prophecy of Joel (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:14-21) about "your sons and daughters will prophesy. . . . Even on my servants, both men and women" (2:17, 18). If the women were totally silent on the Day of Pentecost, why did Peter cite this prophecy about women?

Daughters and women stand out in this prophecy. Why did he stress "both men and women"? Our awareness of this prophecy calls to mind the words of Paul as he preached Jesus in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:13-52). What is remarkable about this pericope is found in his discourse about the witnesses (13:31). After relating to his hearers about Jesus' crucifixion and entombment and resurrection, Paul says: "And for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him **from Galilee** to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people" (13:31).

According to Paul, whoever traveled with Jesus "**from Galilee**" are "now" witnesses of these events. Did women travel with Jesus "from Galilee"? As noted above, Mark, as he concludes his Gospel, calls attention to many women who had traveled with Jesus "**from Galilee**" to Jerusalem (Mark 15:40-41); Matthew also beckons notice to several women who traveled with Jesus "**from Galilee**" to Jerusalem (Matthew 27-55-56); Luke, too, summons awareness to women who had traveled with Jesus "**from Galilee**" to Jerusalem (Luke 23:55). Earlier, Luke records the number of several women by name who traveled with Jesus "from one town and village to another" (8:1-3).

Did Paul exclude the women as witnesses in Acts 13:31? If so, there is nothing in the context to indicate that God disenfranchised the women from witnessing concerning the Resurrection of Jesus. Were the women witnesses of the Resurrection? Did Jesus refer to women as witnesses when the disciples were gathered together after the Resurrection (see Luke 24)? Did Jesus promise His Spirit upon both men and women in the Great commission (see Luke 24)? Again, two things stand out in Acts 13:31—"Those who had traveled with Him **from Galilee** to Jerusalem" and "They are now witnesses to our people." Earlier, Luke, in the conclusion of his Gospel, speaks of the women as witnesses of the crucifixion and their having followed Jesus "**from Galilee**":

> The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man." [48] When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. [49] But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things. (Luke 23:47-49)

The following Chapter (13) explores the myth of interpreting the Word of God with a wooden literalness as well as the fallacy of interpreting isolated Scriptures from its context. We cannot necessarily just take the Scriptures at face value without seeking to understand the intent of the author. We are to employ sound methods of interpretation in seeking to unfold the intended meaning of any text. We need to develop the habit of working with the text in order to hear what the original hearers heard. Hopefully, this chapter will assist our understanding of the original setting in order to help remove twentieth century bifocals and journey back into the first century, to stand upon their threshold, to see through their eyes, and to think their thoughts. **God's people must seek to read the Bible without colored glasses, which often leads to distortions.** We must guard against our interpretation as equal to that of Scripture. To accomplish these objectives, it is necessary to learn how to read the Gospel of Matthew and the Pastoral Epistles.

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Literalism and Isolationism of Scripture

> In order to gain a knowledge of any level, it is necessary to possess an appropriate preunderstanding that correlates with what is to be interpreted at that level. An appropriate preunderstanding means that generally four factors must be present: (1) there must be a certain amount of correct information about what is to be interpreted; (2) there must be an attitude present that is open and receptive to making contact with the subject to be interpreted; (3) there must be an ideological structure that is sufficiently flexible and adaptable to treat fairly and objectively that which is to be interpreted; and (4) there must be a methodological approach that is appropriate to the subject to be interpreted.[337]

We frequently read the Word of God with wooden literalness, and, at the same time, interpret Scriptures in isolation from their context. Through carelessness in not handling the Word of God properly, Christians repeatedly divide over the interpretations of particular Scriptures handed down through the centuries. It is not uncommon for us to replace long-held interpretations with the Word itself. Within the Christian community, misapplication of Scriptures became normative and was passed on to succeeding generations as authoritative. This chapter on 1 Timothy 2:9-15 explores several historical records of the way many Christians seek to strengthen their opinions through the quotation of Scripture.

For hundreds of years, we have cited the Bible to prove our traditions or opinions about science, about medicine, and about theology. In the distant past, we discover that Christians rejected the works of Galileo on so-called biblical citations. This was just the tip of the iceberg, the Scriptures were not only employed against him, but many Christians also rejected innovations in the medical field through the quotations of biblical passages. Today numerous Christians justify their intolerance of other Christians through the misapplication of selected and isolated Scriptures.

Unfortunately tradition still governs many of the theological debates today. Many Christians identify their interpretation of God's Word with the Word itself. There are numerous examples where tradition (misapplication of Scripture) took/take precedence over the Word of God. One such example is found in the field of medicine. Donald. T. Atkinson (M.D.) wrote an informative book about the rise of medical science and its beginnings in ritual and magic and of the people who freed it from ignorance.

Just a perusal of his book reveals the illegal use of Scripture that many theologians and non-theologians relied upon in order to deny medical breakthroughs on unfounded religious claims. In one of his chapters, he went right to the heart of the human mind in its rejection of any new concept (We have never done it that way before.), which mental concept is still true not only of science but also of religious thought that differs from our own brand of orthodoxy. He calls attention to the devastating effects of tradition on the minds of both men and women with the following insightful analysis:

[337]Duncan S. Ferguson, *Biblical Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1986), 17.

> The most hurtful habit of the human mind is this tendency to cling to traditions which have withstood the moss, rust, and decay of the past. We seem to hold to our old thoughts with a veneration which is as infallible as it is inexplicable. This unhappy mental faculty makes the mind inaccessible to plain reason and leads toward intolerance.[338]

Since this study is concerned with the abuse of 1 Timothy 2:9-15, within almost every Christian community, we must take pains to discuss the proper use of Scripture in drawing conclusions from a specific text. Before we undertake an analysis of this most badly treated text, it would be helpful to investigate other issues to call attention to the proper methods of interpretation as we seek to untangle the true meaning of a passage(s).

As briefly stated above, to set the stage for a correct appreciation of this most controversial text, it is necessary to scrutinize other oddities that were upheld by many sincere persons to give credence to their unfounded positions and the basic principle of interpretation. This present chapter will analyze the wooden literalness of Scriptural interpretation. The church as a whole has habitually read 1 Timothy 2:9-15 to uphold the time-honored belief that women are not to be trusted or used in the teaching of God's Word, especially in a congregational setting.

BASIC RULES OF INTERPRETATION

History and Culture

As we seek to unravel this controversial text, we must always bear in mind that hermeneutics (interpretation) is not done in a vacuum. The interpreter generally gives his or her explanation of a passage within his or her own religious culture. In order to interpret the Word of God correctly, we must step outside our own spiritual heritage and read the text with fresh eyes. We must seek to exegete the wording in light of its context. We should never read into the passage(s) what we wish the author to say. We should guard against the common tendency to read into the text our own presuppositions. Charles Trombley gives eight rules to apply to a proper interpretation of any document. The following is his list of rules that legal experts employ:

1. **Rule of Definition**. Define the terms of words being considered and then adhere to the defined meanings.
2. **Rule of Usage**. Don't add meanings to established words and terms. What was the common usage in the culture and time period when the passage was written?
3. **Rule of Context**. Avoid using words out of context. Context must define terms and how words are used.
4. **Rule of Historical Background**. Don't separate interpretation and historical investigation.
5. **Rule of Logic**. Be certain that words as interpreted agree with the overall premise.
6. **Rule of Precedent**. Use the known and commonly accepted meanings of words, not obscure meanings for which there is no precedent.
7. **Rule of Unity**. Even though many documents may be used there must be a general unity among them.
8. **Rule of Inference**. Base conclusion on what is already known and proven or can be reasonably implied from all known facts.[339]

First Timothy is embodied within a certain history and culture. Since this is so, we must seek from the context the problem(s) that the author was seeking to deal. Without an understanding of what was going on at the time of the writing, we cannot expect to arrive at an accurate comprehension. As a result of this failure to consult the full context, this pericope (unit of Scripture) has become one of the most abused texts within the Christian community. Just a casual reading of the religious journals reveals that this pericope is plastic, that is to say, it is frequently and easily molded into the preconceived ideas of the interpreter, not the intent of the author.

The weakness of many interpreters is that one's presuppositions are often read into the Scriptures rather than being read out of Scripture. Countless Christians tend to confuse their view of Scripture with their own explanation. If someone disagrees with the long-established view of a passage, then that person is unsound, at

[338]Donald T. Atkinson, *Magic, Myth and Medicine* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1956), 272.
[339]Charles Trombley, *Who Said Women Can't Teach?* (South Plainfield, NJ: Bridge Publishing, Inc., 1985), 135-136.

least, according to some churches. On the surface, what seems plausible as our commitment to Scripture is often the commitment to our own reading of Scripture.

Isolation of Context

One of the great fallacies in the study of Scripture is reference to Scripture in isolation from its own unique context. There is nothing wrong with quoting Scripture, but we must exert every effort to apply the passage correctly. Numerous Christians labor under the impression that if they can quote a Scripture verbatim, then that settles the matter. But this exact quotation by the reader is not the whole story. If we fail to hear the intent of the author, we neglect to pay attention to the Word of God. We should allow the Word of God in its full context to be the final word, not tradition. It is not uncommon for us to pick and choose on the basis of our own cultural heritage in our own unique explanation of Scripture. We must learn to reevaluate and reinterpret what has been handed down to us from the church leaders. Robert Stein is correct when he writes: "To understand the divine meaning of Scripture, then, is to understand the conscious meaning of God's inspired servants who wrote them."[340]

APPLYING SOUND PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

> Like any growth, development may be healthy or it may be malignant; discerning the difference between these two kinds of growth requires constant research into the pathology of traditions. But it is healthy development that keeps a tradition both out of the cancer ward and out of the fossil museum.[341]

To further illustrate how to apply sound principles in the field of biblical interpretation, this section analyzes certain key Scriptures from the Book of Matthew in order to drive home the point of watertight beliefs of interpretation before we advance a particular view about a text(s). In the nineteenth century, **Friedrich Schleiermacher** (1768-1834), German theologian and philosopher, originated the idea of the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle philosophy simply means: "**Each part of a text must be interpreted with reference to the whole; yet the meaning of the whole cannot be grasped without considering the parts**."[342] Interpretation is an attempt to understand the work as a whole by an analysis of its elements.[343] Hermeneutics[344] ordinarily covers the whole field of interpretation, including exegesis.[345] Nevertheless, hermeneutics is often used in a much narrower sense to grasp the relevance of ancient works. In other words, it is concerned about the "here" and "now."[346] Louis. Berkhof (1873-1957), Reformed theologian, makes the following succinct observation:

The *necessity* of the study of hermeneutics follows from several considerations:

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[340]Robert H. Stein, *A Basic guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 28.

[341]Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 60.

[342]Kathleen Morner and Ralph Rausch, "Hermeneutics," *NTC's Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Illinois: NTC Publishing Group, 1991), 97.

[343] Ibid.

[344] See Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 17, where Stein writes: "The term 'hermeneutics,' . . . simply describes the practice or discipline of interpretation." See also Thomas H. Olbright, *Hearing God's Voice* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1996), 185, where he says, "In a large sense, hermeneutics constitutes a theory about how one person explains or communicates a text to another."

[345]See Morner and Rausch, "Exegesis," Ibid., 72,73, where they say, "Originally, the detailed analysis, explanation, and INTERPRETATION of passages in the Bible, or, by extension, of any literary or intellectual text. The term carries with it a sense of digging out the meaning of a difficult passage."

[346]See Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*: A Guide to Understanding the Bible (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 25.

1. Sin darkened the understanding of man, and still exercises a pernicious influence on his conscious mental life. Therefore, special efforts must be made to guard against error.
2. Men differ from one another in many ways that naturally cause them to drift apart mentally. They differ, for instance,
   (a) in intellectual capacity, aesthetic taste, and moral quality resulting in a lack of spiritual affinity:
   (b) in intellectual attainment, some being educated, and others uneducated; and
   (c) in nationality, with a corresponding difference in language, forms of thought, customs, and morals.[347]

Hayes and Holiday define exegesis as an attempt "to reach an informed understanding of the text."[348] It is possible for an interpreter to miss the point of the text if he or she does not consider the "linguistic, cultural, and historical background to the inspired writings," writes Cedric Johnson.[349] It is also in this vein that Berkhof cautions Christians not to fall into the same trap that many fell into during the Reformation. Berkhof again sharpens the focus of caution:

> The militant spirit of the age found expression in hundreds of polemical writings. Each one sought to defend his own opinion with an appeal to Scripture. *Exegesis became the handmaid of dogmatics, and degenerated into a mere search for proof-texts.* The Scriptures were studied in order to find there the truths that were embodied in the Confessions.[350]

Many Christians encounter long-held traditions in his or her quest to understand the Word of God in its context.[351] It is not uncommon for believers to identify the traditions of their "interpretative community" with the Word itself. Johnson expresses the basic problem well in his discussion of presuppositions:

> Generations of scholars in the field of hermeneutics have recognized the influence of preunderstanding on interpretation. C. S. Lewis observed that "what we learn from experience depends on the kind of philosophy we bring to experience."[352]

Untold numbers with whom I have discussed the science of exposition have shared their frustrations and have described their Christian journeys as "**Gullible's Travels**."[353] We often accept what we are taught without question. It is in this sense that our interpretation is neither subjective nor objective. In other words, we have never taken the time to employ our minds subjectively in analyzing the Scripture for ourselves, nor have we looked at the Scriptures objectively. Our interpretations are "ready-made or prefabricated meanings."[354] Our interpretations are hand-me-downs from our interpretative community. Again, Fish rightly says, "In other words

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[347]L. Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962), 12.

[348]John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook,* revised edition (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1987), 23.

[349]Cedric B. Johnson, *The Psychology of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 20. See also Dallas Burdette, "Passover Traditions in the Time of Christ" in *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood, FL: Xulon, 2008), 181-195 for an example of the application of the above principles—"linguistic, cultural, and historical background."

[350] Berkhof, *Interpretation*, 28-29.

[351] See Hayes and Holladay, *Exegesis*, 66, where they write:

> The best guide to the meaning of a word is the context in which it is used. This means, first of all, the immediate context of the passage in which it occurs. If a word has several meanings, one should explore the range of meanings and see how they fit or do not fit in the context. A broader context is the whole of the document in which the terms appear. One should explore how a term is used and what it denotes elsewhere in the document.

[352] Johnson, *Interpretation*, 45.

[353]See Dallas Burdette, "Dallas Burdette's "*My* Pilgrimage of Faith" in *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood FL: Xulon, 2008), 1-26, which chapter develops the evolution of my thinking in my Christian journey. This chapter is informative in that I discuss basic principles of how to interpret Scriptures. This study discusses many of the "pit falls" that I encountered on my spiritual journey as a boy preacher. To a great extent, my earlier spiritual journey could be described as "Gullible's Travels."

[354]Stanley Fish, *Is There A Text in This Class?* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980), 172.

interpretive[355] communities are no more stable than texts because interpretive strategies are not natural or universal, but learned."[356] In spite of Fish's deconstruction philosophy, nevertheless, he is correct when he writes:

> And, moreover, the way of seeing, whatever it was, would never be individual or idiosyncratic, since its source would always be the institutional structure of which the "see-er" was an extending agent. This is what Sacks means when he says that a culture fills brains "so that they are alike in fine detail"; it fills them so that no one's interpretive acts are exclusively his own but fall to him by virtue of his position in some socially organized environment and are therefore always shared and public.[357]

Leaders, especially ministers, often memorize verses from the Bible by the hundreds. But their interpretation frequently is not so much theirs, as it is the interpretation of a social structure to which they belong; that is to say, their interpretative community. Traditions still stand in the way of listening anew to the biblical text.[358] Once more, the Gonzalezs' caution: "We must learn to reevaluate and reinterpret what has been handed down to us."[359] It is still very difficult for us to conceive that we might cite Scripture and, at the same time, fail to apply the text correctly in light of its historical background.

Some religious writers suppose they have all the answers, and as a result of this kind of intellectualization, the intellectually correct party ostracizes those who go against the grain with their particular interpretative community. It is not uncommon for Christians to justify condemnation over against the so-called nonconformist by citing Matthew 7:15 out of context, which reads: "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves." We may quote Matthew 7:15 or 1 Timothy 2:9-15 correctly, but we must also examine the context before drawing conclusions.

We must be careful that we do not go to the Scriptures to prove what we already believe, but rather to see what they say. We are so accustomed to reading the Bible as previously taught by generations of interpreters that we cannot distinguish between interpretation and Revelation. In other words, for one to question the traditional interpretations is tantamount to questioning the Word of God itself.[360] This failure to discriminate between explanation and Divine inspiration is one of the main obstacles that we encounter in our efforts to liberate the Bible from its culture and to maintain unity among God's people. The heritage of explaining is confused with the text itself. The faith of the fathers becomes the watchword for orthodoxy; the interpretation of the fathers becomes normative and is passed on as authoritative.

One of the most difficult obstacles for any Christian is to approach the text without any strong personal biases. Studying the Bible with colored glasses ultimately leads to distortion of the text.[361] We often tend to

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[355]Fish does not use "interpretative community" but "interpretive community."

[356] Ibid. I disagree with Fish's philosophy of the text being unstable. If I understand Fish correctly, he is a deconstructionist in his philosophy. See Morner and Rausch, "Deconstructive Criticism," *NTC's Dictionary*, 50-51, where they explain "deconstruction":

> An approach to LITERARY CRITICISM based on the views and procedures of the French thinker Jacques Derrida. Deconstructive criticism utilizes reader-centered theories of meaning that ignore reference to the author's intention and deny the possibility of a terminate meaning or "correct" interpretation for any text. Deconstructive criticism makes possible innumerable contradictory but "undecidable" meanings. First becoming prominent in the 1970s, deconstructive criticism is central to POST-STRUCTURALISM.

[357]Ibid., 335.

[358]See Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 48-68.

[359]Ibid., 31.

[360]For an insightful article on the differentiation between Revelation and interpretation, see Leroy Garrett, "It Means What It Says," *Restoration Review* 17, no. 4 (April 1975): 68-71.

[361]See Johnson, *Interpretation* , 42, where he captures, in concise language, the subjective biases of all interpreters:

> My contention is that conflicting theological positions are in part due to the fact that we all approach a text, sacred or secular, with our strong subjective biases. Even though we have a commitment to read the Bible on its own terms: and

give preconceived beliefs the same authority as we give to the Bible. In other words, our preconceived political power is equal to that of the Scriptures. Our own personal journey of faith, with the ghosts of the past, makes it very difficult for us to view the Scriptures without prejudice. Our prior understanding and interpretation makes it difficult to sift out the truths of God in dealing with the text.[362] The culture of our heritage controls the text of the Bible. We should never forget that our own journey occurs within a vast architecture of preunderstanding—no thinking takes place in a vacuum. Frederic W. Farrar (1831-1903), Dean of Canterbury and author, draws attention to the religious hatred that generates from this know-it-all attitude:

> My opinions are founded on interpretations of Scripture. Scripture is infallible. My views of its meaning are infallible too. Your opinions and inferences differ from mine; therefore you must be in the wrong. All wrong opinions are capable of so many ramifications that any one who differs from me in minor points must be unsound in vital matters also. Therefore all who differ from me and my clique are "heretics." All heresy is wicked; all heretics are necessarily wicked men. It is my religious duty to hate, calumniate and abuse you.[363]

Contextual Interpretation

The first step in explaining Scripture is to read the text. To fathom a passage involves the immediate context, the remote context, and the larger context. The *immediate context* includes verses preceding and following the reference that one is studying. On the other hand, the *remote context* may take in the entire book in which the text is found. Also, the *larger context* may embrace the whole of God's written Revelation. This understanding of contexts helps to determine the meaning or meanings that we attach to any distinct phrase.

Otherwise, we may impose conjectured convictions on a text without due reflection upon what the author says. Without a conception of a context, a person's particular context tends to shape his or her understanding and interpretation of the message. Sidney Greidanus is correct when he says, "An interpreter must be careful not to read more into a text than is actually there at that particular stage of redemptive history."[364]

Merely reciting Scriptures that draw attention to certain party dogmas is not sufficient to determine the meaning of the text. Remember that the context is the determining factor in trying to arrive at a correct insight. We must <u>not</u> employ Holy Scripture in a way the Holy Spirit did not employ them. Leroy Garrett points out with justification that

> People tire of our equating our understanding of the word of God with the word of God itself. This is to say that we must distinguish between revelation and interpretation. Revelation is what God has given us in scripture. Interpretation is what we conclude the scriptures to mean. One is divine, the other human.[365]

To use an example as cited above, we may cite Matthew 7:15—"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves"—correctly, but not necessarily speak *as* the Bible speaks. We may speak ***<u>where</u>*** the Bible speaks and not speak ***<u>as</u>*** the Bible speaks. In order to understand this passage of Scripture, it is necessary to study the whole of Matthew's Gospel before analyzing individual elements. The same is true with 1 Timothy 2:9-15. We must study the whole of the Pastoral Epistles before analyzing individual elements.

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even though we want the Divine and human authors to speak for themselves, somehow we still come up with contradictory views on some issues.

[362]For an excellent presentation of this concept, see Gonzalez and Gonzalez, "Difficulties in Hearing the Text," in *Preaching*, 29-47.

[363]Frederick W. Farrar, "Religious Hatred," quoted in Carl Ketcherside, *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 6 (June 1965): 92.

[364]Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 71.

[365]Garrett, "It Means What It Says," 69.

View of the Whole versus the Particular

As we contemplate a study of the whole of Matthew's Gospel or a study of the Pastoral Epistles, it is imperative that we examine the full text of each book before an analysis of its parts (for example, Matthew 7:15 and 1 Timothy 2:9-15). If a reader explores a specific verse without weighing its sum total, then one's reflection may radically alter a correct view of a particular text. Examples of particularization of texts without contexts to support certain dogmatic presuppositions are rampant among many Christians. We may consider the following isolated Scriptures as examples of frequently cited texts that are misapplied by many sincere Christians to uphold a sectarian spirit that divides the Christian community for which Jesus prayed (John 17).

- Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. (Matthew 7:15)
- Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. (7:13-14)
- If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell. (5:29-30)
- But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. (5:39)
- Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. (7:1-2)
- I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, [10] but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. [11] A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. [12] I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. [13] For Adam was formed first, then Eve. [14] And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. [15] But women [a] will be saved [b] through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety. (1 Timothy 2:9-15)

It is not uncommon for interpreters to impose their own conceptual grids on a text without due reflection. When we approach the Word of God, we should approach with a hermeneutics of suspicion. In other words, we should be conscious of our own fallibility in interpreting Scriptures. Our interpretation should always remain the object of suspicion and of critical evaluation. We must have a self-critical stance toward the tendency to impose our own agenda upon the exposition of Scripture. This is especially true in the above Scripture citations (Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24; 1 Timothy 2:9-15).

For many believers, false prophets (7:15) are those who disagree with their brand of orthodoxy or interpretation of Scripture, especially with relationship to the role of women in the Christian community. Also, many appeal to the Scripture (7:13-14) about the small gate and the narrow road to give credence to their particular denominational stance as the only way to heaven. As a result of literalism, some Christians have even taken the self-mutilation language (5:29-30) as a call to physical impairment of the body. Among some religious movements, the turning of the right cheek (5:39) is cited as justification for not defending one's country in the time of war. Again, we must ask: what is the context?

We cannot necessarily just take the Scriptures at face value without seeking to understand the intent of the author. We are to employ sound methods of interpretation in seeking to unfold the intended meaning of any text. We need to develop the habit of working with the text in order to hear what the original hearers heard. Hopefully, this chapter will assist our understanding of the original setting in order to help remove Twentieth Century bifocals and journey back into the First Century, to stand upon their threshold, to see through their eyes, and to think their thoughts. God's people must seek to read the Bible without colored glasses, which often

a Greek *she*
b Or *restored*

leads to distortions. We must guard against our interpretation as equal to that of Scripture. To accomplish these objectives, it is necessary to learn how to read the Gospel of Matthew and the Pastoral Epistles.

ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE MISUSE OF SCRIPTURE

Eufame MacLayne

A classic example of the misuse of Scripture is found in the tragic story of Eufame MacLayne (AD 1591). Her story reveals the mindset of literalness and isolation of Scripture by Christians in the Sixteenth Century. Bernard Seeman wrote a book about man's endeavor to relieve pain in suffering. He recounts the story of Eufame MacLayne who took an herb to lessen her pain during the birth of twins. But according to the church fathers, this action violated the Law of God and was also contempt for the Crown. They based their views on what God had said to Eve: "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children" (Genesis 3:16).

As a result of a midwife's (Agnes Sampson, unknown-executed, (she died, January 28th, 1591, as a witch) concern for pain, she provided her with the medicine she needed to relieve some of the pain during childbirth. Because Eufame took something to help alleviate her pain, she was brought before the church leaders and condemned to death. She had her twins taken forcibly from her and then she was forcibly chained to a stake and reduced to ashes.[366] This mindset originated with the literal interpretation of Scripture, not its intent.

Sir James Simpson

Seeman also relates another story about the introduction of anesthetics for the relief of pain.[367] In 1847, **Sir James Simpson** (1811-1870), British physician, discovered the anesthetic properties of chloroform.[368] After learning about the success of ether in the United States, he immediately started using this with his patients. As a result of the smell and irritating actions of ether, he looked for a less troublesome anesthetic. He ultimately decided upon chloroform that had been recently discovered by a German chemist, **Justus von Leibig**.[369] After publishing his results, he came under attack from "fellow physicians, from the clergy, from teachers, from the

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[366]Bernard Seeman, *Man Against Pain: 3000 Years of Effort to Understand and Relieve Physical Suffering* (Philadelphia: Chilton Company, 1962), 96. See also Andrew D. White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*, vol., 2 (New York: George Braziller, 1955), 62, 63. Volumes 1 and 2 are combined in one volume. See also Dr. Donald T. Atkinson, *Magic, Myth and Medicine* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1956), 271-272, in which he too recounts this tragic story:

> Looking down on the new beautiful Princes Street of Edinburgh, Scotland, is Castle Hill. Here in 1591 a crime was committed which illustrates the old-time psychology. Up this hill, one bleak morning, was forcibly dragged Eufame MacLayne, a lady of rank and refinement. A few minutes before, she had clung desperately to her twin babies, but these had been torn from her by the crown bailiff. At the summit a stake had been driven in the ground and around it wood had been piled. As she knelt, chains were wrapped around her body and in less than an hour ashes was all that remained of Eufame MacLayne. This execution was not the result of mob violence, for the victim had been tried by due process of law and had been convicted. Evidence was advanced which proved that she had employed a midwife, "one Agnes Sampson to administer unto her a certain medicine for the relief of pain in childbirth contrary to divine law and in contempt of the crown."
>
> Eufame MacLayne's fate had been sealed by precedent. Convention had made it an insult to the Deity to assist a woman in labor. This was a crime which always drew the extreme penalty in medieval Europe. In 1521 Viethes, a Hamburg physician was arrested for attempting to mitigate the pains of labor. By nature Viethes was generous and kind, and his patient, a frail woman, begged for relief. Her entreaties reached the heart of this good man and he complied with her request. Immediately the wheels of the law began to turn and a conviction was soon obtained for the crown. A few weeks later an unusual light shone one night over Hamburg. They were burning Dr. Viethes.

[367]Ibid., 122-125. See also Andrew D. White, Ibid., 62, 63.

[368]See Monica Winefryde Furlong, "Anesthesia," in Microsoft ® Encarta ® Encyclopedia 2003 (CD Deluxe). © 1993-2002 Microsoft Corporation.

[369]Seeman, *Man Against Pain*, 122.

so-called enlightened and intelligent. Newspapers, magazines and pamphlets joined to loose their arrows at him."[370] **Andrew White** (1832-1918), U.S. diplomat, author, educator, and founder of Cornell University, wrote:

> From pulpit after pulpit Simpson's use of chloroform was denounced as impious and contrary to Holy Writ; texts were cited abundantly, the ordinary declaration being that to use chloroform was "to avoid one part of the primeval curse on woman." Simpson wrote pamphlet after pamphlet to defend the blessing which he brought into use; but he seemed about to be overcome, when he seized a new weapon, probably the most absurd by which a great cause was ever won: "My opponents forget," he said, "the twenty-first verse of the second chapter of Genesis; it is the record of the first surgical operation ever performed, and that text proves that the Maker of the universe, before he took the rib from Adam's side for the creation of Eve, caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam."[371]

Why was there such a vivacious attack against this Professor of Obstetrics at the University of Glasgow, Scotland? Seeman says, "At the core of the attacks was the belief that the use of anesthesia in labor was an attempt to contravene the decrees of Providence, hence reprehensible and heretical."[372] Numerous individuals objected to anesthesia in labor for childbirth as an attempt to circumvent the Genesis mandate: "with pain you will give birth to children" (Genesis 3:16). Since Dr. Simpson was well versed in logic and theology, he examined the objections on religious as well as scientific grounds. In his defense, he exposed his critics with the following words:

> Were the curse in Genesis to be accepted literally, as the defenders of pain were doing, then a man sinned each time he eased his labor by using an ox, a plow or even fertilizer to enrich the soil. Any labor-saving device was as much in contravention of the Lord's curse as pain-saving anesthetic.[373]

Boyer

We must exercise caution that we do not isolate a passage from its context. Boyer, early in the nineteenth century, presented inoculation as a preventive of small pox in France. Not long after this introduction of vaccination, theologians were soon finding reasons against the innovative practice. Rev. Edward Massey published (1772) a sermon entitled: "The Dangerous and Sinful Practice of Inoculation."[374] The Theologians argued that the disease of smallpox, as well as other diseases, was "sent by Providence for the punishment of sin; and the proposed attempt to prevent them is 'a diabolical operation.'"[375] Another preacher, Rev. Mr. Delafaye, also preached a sermon with the title: "Inoculation and Indefensible Practice."[376] White writes: "The same opposition was vigorous in Protestant Scotland. A large body of ministers joined in denouncing the new practice as 'flying in the face of Providence,' and 'endeavoring to baffle a Divine judgment.'"[377]

Another physician, Dr. Zabdiel Boylston (1676/79-1766), medical doctor, in 1721, inoculated his son. As a result of this experiment, he encountered bitter hostility. Another physician, Dr. Douglas, a Scotch, insisted that inoculation was "poisoning." The opposing party urged the authorities to try Dr. Boylston for murder. Again, White discloses the inner thoughts of the radicals: "That the smallpox is 'a judgment of God on the sins of the people,' and that 'to avert it is but to provoke him more'; that inoculation is 'an encroachment on the prerogatives of Jehovah, whose right it is to wound and smite.'"[378]

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[370]Ibid., 123, 124.

[371]Andrew White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*, Vol., 2 (New York: George Braziller, 1955), 63.

[372]Ibid., 123.

[373]Ibid., 125.

[374]Ibid., 55.

[375]Ibid.

[376]Ibid., 55, 56.

[377]Ibid., 56.

[378]Ibid.

Many Scriptures were employed to bolster their claims against smallpox and inoculations. In their arsenal of isolated Scriptures, they also cited Hosea 6:1 to justify their negative reaction, which reads: "He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds." This Scripture was torn out of its context to give credence to their presuppositions founded upon an illegal use of Scripture. They used this Scripture as their means of justification against using means of healing for any disease, not just smallpox.[379]

How did they prove their presuppositions? By isolating Scriptures from their context, they were able to prove to the masses that they were right. In the evolution of medicine, we also encounter's Edward Jenner's (1749-1823), English scientist and doctor, discovery of vaccination. One of his professional colleagues, Dr. Moseley, in opposition to vaccination, wrote a title page for his book: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."[380] In 1798 physicians and clergymen sought to suppress vaccination as "bidding defiance to Heaven itself, even to the will of God" by forming an Anti-vaccination Society.[381] But eventually right reason gained the day.

Dr. Ignatz Philipp Semmelweis

Dr. Semmelweis (1818-1865), a young Hungarian physician, went to Vienna (1848) for advanced studies in obstetrics. This hospital provided him with firsthand studies dealing with childbirth. This hospital frequently put new cases into the beds of those who had just died with the "Childbed Fever" without changing the bedding. He soon discovered that one out of every ten births left the baby motherless. Many reasons were associated with the sudden death of the mothers. One physician, Meigs of Philadelphia, one of the greatest obstetricians of his time, attributed the deaths to "Justification of Providence; a judgment instituted to remind us of the sin committed by the mother of the race."[382] Dr. Semmelweis performed post-mortems to try to determine the cause of death. But this resulted in no visible means of determining the cause of death.

He left Vienna and went to Venice as a discouraged, overworked, and nervous individual. A few weeks later, he returned to Vienna and discovered doctors performing an autopsy on the body of Dr. Kolletschka, who had just died from septicemia (invasion of the blood-stream by virulent microorganisms—blood poisoning) as a result of a wound he had received in the dissecting room. This triggered his memory in the recall of deaths that were much higher in one section of the hospital than another over which the midwives were delivering babies. As he reflected upon this problem, he then realized that the doctors who performed autopsies left the dissected bodies to deliver babies without washing their hands. As a result of this discovery, he had all his students to wash their hands with a solution of chloride of calcium before delivery. The death rate plummeted. Thus, this discovery transformed a theory into fact.

As a result of this find, he wrote a book, *The Cause, Concept, and Prophylaxis of Puerperal Fever*, "a work that would one day revolutionize the science of obstetrics."[383] Since his findings did not coincide with the traditional ideas, he was persecuted. In Austria, he was bitterly opposed by two individuals—Scanzoni and Carl Braun—along with leading obstetricians. As stated above, many physicians contributed the childbed fever to "bad ventilation, to bad water, to improper food, and to disordered psychic states. Yet, by the older and more devout physicians it was thought to be the result of the Edenic curse."[384] The "Edenic curse" would be Genesis 3:16. During the early part of 1865, the criticism became so severe that Dr. Semmelweis became insane. Physical disease set in and in November he died. Did he die for nothing? No! Later, the work that he did laid the groundwork for "Pasteur's discovery of the role played by microorganisms in the production of fermentation."[385] Later, the renowned surgeon, Joseph Lister (1827-1912, English surgeon and father of modern surgery, saw the principle of antiseptic surgery initiated by Dr. Semmelweis and proclaimed Semmelweis as his

[379]Ibid.
[380]Ibid., 58.
[381]Ibid.
[382]Donald T. Atkinson, *Magic, Myth and Medicine*, 274.
[383]Ibid., 276.
[384]Ibid., 274.
[385]Ibid., 277.

forerunner.[386] Once more, we can see the devastating effects of one's misuse of the Bible; it wreaks havoc upon God's creation.

Jesus' Confrontation with Satan

A classic example of context is Jesus' confrontation with Satan. Scripture citations came from both Satan and Jesus. Matthew's record of Jesus' encounter with Satan in the wilderness is a masterpiece of how not to interpret Scripture and how to interpret Scripture. It is one thing to quote Scripture and another thing to give the intent of the passage. Matthew's account reveals Satan citing Psalm 91:11-12 to Jesus in order to bolster his claim that Jesus could jump from "the highest point of the temple" (Matthew 4:5). Satan quoted the Scriptures accurately, but he did not look at the intent. Jesus also cited another Scripture to Satan to demonstrate that he had incorrectly interpreted this section of the Psalm. Jesus cited Deuteronomy 6:16 to illustrate that one cannot pit one Scripture against another Scripture. The following chart sets forth Psalm 91:11-12 and Satan's citation of Psalm 91:11-12 in Matthew 4:6:

Psalm 91:11-12	Matthew 4:6
For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; [12] they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.	For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. [b]"

Give to One Who Asks

Another example from the Sermon on the Mount should help to drive home the necessity of context before building one's theology upon an isolated passage. Should we interpret Matthew 5:42 literally? Jesus says, "give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you" (5:42). Can we utilize discretion in giving money to others who ask? How many Christians interpret this passage literally? Did Paul contradict Jesus when he wrote the following to the Thessalonians: "For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: 'If a man will not work, he shall not eat'" (1 Thessalonians 3:10)?

Again, how should we interpret the following words: "But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matthew 5:39)? Does God expect us to interpret this literally? If someone should hit you in the head with a baseball bat, does God expect you to stand up—provided it does not kill you—and say, "Well, hit me on the other side"? The reason for stressing these matters is to call attention to the necessity of interpreting according to meaning.[387] Understanding of these principles of interpretation should also help one to discard so much tradition placed upon 1 Timothy 2:9-15.

Amos 6:5 versus 2 Chronicles 29:25

Another illustration of how some Christians misapply a Scripture in order to maintain their disapproving views toward the use of instruments in the corporate praise assembly is found in Amos 6:5. This Scripture is applied by many believers to prove that God did not approve of David's command to use instruments of music in praise to God.[388] I, too, cited Amos 6:5 the first seventeen years of my ministry to prove that God condemned

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[386]Ibid.

b Psalm 91:11,12

[387]For examples of hyperbole (bold exaggeration for emphasis), see Chapter 8 ("Divorce Sayings in the Synoptics") in this book (pp. 150-188).

[388]See Goebel Music, "The New Testament Commands Us to Use Old Testament Psalms," *The Spiritual Sword* 10, no. 1 (October 1978): 22-27.

David for introducing instrumental music into the Old Testament worship. I had to revise my earlier position—a position that I was taught as a teenager—when I discovered a passage in which God commanded David to use instruments. I then recognized that whatever Amos was saying, he could not be saying what I said he said. The following chart should put this misapplication in proper perspective:

2 Chronicles 29:25	Amos 6:5
He stationed the Levites in the temple of the LORD with cymbals, harps and lyres in the way prescribed by David and Gad the king's seer and Nathan the prophet; this was commanded by the LORD through his prophets.	You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments

If we employ Amos 6:5 to condemn the use of instruments, we fail to take into consideration the context of this passage. We cannot nullify 2 Chronicles 29:25 with Amos 6:5. To do so is to violate God's Word. Kevin Giles, vicar of St. Michael's Church, North Carlton, Australia, warns about an invalid approach to the study of Scriptures with comments about 1 Timothy 2:9-15:

> Making 1 Tim. 2:9-15 the key to understanding what the Scriptures teach about women and the narrow lens through which the whole Bible is read on this matter distorts the overall picture. It is not a valid methodological approach. Parallels would be to make James 2:18-26 the focal point to begin working out a doctrine of justification, or Revelation 10:1-10 the commencement point for a study of eschatology, or Acts 8:4-25 the foundation for a theology of Spirit reception. To capture the overall drift of Scripture on any matter we need to listen to the whole, and take into account the passages of Scripture those with whom we differ think are important. The history of the church tells us that when this is not done Christians invariably fall into theological error. Indeed, the late Oscar Cullmann [1902-1999] argued that 'the fountain head of all false Bible interpretation and all heresy is invariably the isolation and absolutising of one single passage.'[389]

CONCLUSION

As we approach the interpretation of any text, we should never attack the sincerity of those who follow a path that is not in keeping with the context—many of whom are no doubt good and godly men and women—but there is still a need to guard against an interpretation that does not ring true to the biblical Revelation itself. When we, as interpreters, seek to understand the part (isolated text), we must first seek to understand the whole (the entire book). In the study of 1 Timothy 2:9-15, we should study the background of the Pastoral Epistles (First Timothy, Second Timothy, and Titus) before we undertake to understand the particulars. Since 1 Timothy 2:9-15 is a part of a larger narrative, it seems that the reader should interpret this isolated text in light of the overall meaning of the book itself. Also, it is safe to say that a search for the theme of the book should go a long way to a proper understanding of the text in dispute. Robert Stein correctly says, "The way an author helps his readers understand the meaning he seeks to convey is through context."[390]

As we seek to find an answer to the meaning behind 1 Timothy 2:9-15, we must always be conscious that our prejudice(s) can be so deep-seated that, in effect, a verdict is passed even before the evidence (the whole book) is considered. This mindset results in the impossibility of understanding the text. Yet again, the words of Kevin Giles are to the point about looking for an overall theme in the interpretation of any passage:

> The prohibition on women's exercising authority and teaching in church in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 is addressed to a particular situation. This text is to be understood against the backdrop of false teaching that had erupted in Ephesus, which

[389]Kevin Giles, "A Critique of the 'Novel' Contemporary Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9-15 Given in the Book, Women in the Church. Part II," *The Evangelical Quarterly* LXXII, no. 3 (July 2000): 207.

[390]Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 57.

had led both men and women astray. Women had been allowed to teach in church, since Paul first founded the church several years previously, but now he forbids them from doing so.[391]

The next chapter explores another text that needs to be looked at through new eyes. Romans 16:17 is in the arsenal of many Christian men and women, which Scripture, to many, justifies separation from other devout and sincere Christians.

[391]Kevin Giles, *The Trinity & Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God & the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity, 2002), 206, 207.

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Watch Out for Those Who Cause Divisions

> The exegete who is doing his or her work properly is forever asking the question: But what is the point? What is the author driving at? That is, one is always raising the question of the author's intent. . . . Further, one is also wary [cautious] of over-exegeting—for example, finding something that would stagger the author were he informed someone had found it in his writing, or building a theology upon the use of . . . discovering meaning in what was not said.[392]

Romans 16:17 flashes like neon lights through many religious journals. One of Paul's statements toward the close of his Epistle is one of the most abused Scriptures within Christendom by many sincere Christians. "Contrary to the teaching you have learned" is cited by many Christians to advocate their own particular interpretation of God's Word. Whatever they learned from the church fathers just happens to be what Paul writes about. I, too, misused this Scripture during the early part of my ministry (seventeen years) to justify separation from other sincere godly men and women who did not agree with my particular interpretation of certain Scriptures, especially those concerned with my concept of the so-called five acts (rituals) performed during a public worship service. This controversial passage concludes Paul's Epistle to the Romans. He writes with this intense warning: "I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them" (Romans 16:17).

This chapter is not designed to castigate Christians who misapply this Scripture, but rather to shed light upon the true meaning of Paul's words. This passage is frequently employed in order to justify disconnection from other believers who do not fall in-line with the so-called faithful brothers. Unfortunately, many believers latch onto this verse as their own unique property. Since Christianity is divided into many splinter groups, each unique fellowship wallops other groups not in line with their thinking. This statement of Paul is called forth by many sincere and godly men and women in order to demonstrate to the church and to the world that they will not tolerate dissent from the status quo.

Since I grew up in the one-cup and non-Sunday school segment of the Churches of Christ, I am well acquainted with battles of at least one hundred and fifty years of tradition.[393] Many within this movement (Churches of Christ in general) are so imbued with their own particular splinter group's understanding that they can no longer distinguish between their customs and the Word of God. Yet, this mindset is not restricted to this fellowship of believers, but rather it crosses all denominational lines. Regrettably, many of God's children cannot distinguish between their interpretation of God's Word and Holy Scripture. Jesus, too, confronted this

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[392]Gordon D. Fee, *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1991), 17.

[393]Some of the mostly godly men and women that I have ever known are associated with the one-cup and non-Sunday school fellowship of God's people. When I write about this movement or the Churches of Christ in general, I am not questioning their honesty and dedication to God, but rather I am trying to help these believers in Christ to come to a clearer understanding of God's Word.

same scenario of long-held traditions when He arrived on the scene to begin His ministry of announcing Himself as God's Good News for the salvation of lost humanity.

As Jesus began His preaching and teaching ministry, He, too, confronted at least one hundred and fifty years of beliefs as advanced by the religious leaders. They, like so many of us, could not differentiate between their practice and the Word of God itself. Even today, there are many traditions that exist within God's family that are still associated with the Word. This in-depth study is concerned with believers who wrench this Scripture out of context to support their castigation, or chastisement, of other saints. Having said this, I do not believe this misapplication is done with the intent to violate God's Word. This misapplication, or treatment, is primarily a hand-me-down teaching, which goes all the way back to the beginning of the Protestant Reformation Movement.

Just how should we interpret Romans 16:17? How should we explain this passage? To interpret this text correctly, we must again consult the *immediate* context. In other words, the ***immediate context*** would include Chapters 14 and 15. Just a cursory reading of the context indicates that Paul is writing about the spirit of toleration for differences within the Christian community. If individuals insist on their way or "hit the highway," then Paul says, keep your eyes on that person. As we approach this much-abused text, we need to inquire as to the meaning of Paul words: "watch out for those" (**σκοπεῖν τοὺς**, *skopein tous*). Paul did not indicate by this Greek word that Christians are to hack to death with a meat-cleaver anyone who dares to disagree with another believer. One objective of this chapter is to encourage Christians to look at this old text through new eyes.

What did Paul intend to convey by the phrase "watch out for the ones" in this context? The KJV translates the Greek word *skopein* as *mark*, and this rendition is frequently relied upon by various fellowships in order to give credence to disassociate themselves from the so-called unfaithful. Unhappily, many Christians are thrown out of the synagogues through a misapplication of Paul's instructions. In order to arrive at a correct interpretation of Paul's admonition, we need to go to the *immediate context*. It is wrong for believers to employ this Scripture to rationalize their actions of condemnation for those who fail to adhere to a particular interpretation.

I began my ministry within the one-cup and non-Sunday school movement, which movement consists of men and women who try to be true to the Word of God. Nevertheless, this Scripture is one of the first verses that I memorized. My first sermon utilized this citation from Paul to condemn other Churches of Christ for deviating from our practice. Today, we still witness some Churches of Christ citing this verse against those who participate in Sunday school, individual communion cups, Bible colleges, bread-breaking, bread-pinching, wine, grape juice, acapella music, instrumental music, and so on. On the other hand, many within the other denominational Churches of Christ also twist this Scripture to condemn anyone who does not tow-the-line as understood by themselves.

Whether one uses individual cups in the communion or one cup, both groups employ this same Scripture to justify departure from others who do not agree with their particular interpretation of God's Word on various issues. Both groups will cite Romans 16:17 to lambaste the other group with the epithet: "Division Makers." This legitimate statement of Paul is utilized to force subjection to a meticulous brand of orthodoxy. And those who do not conform to the traditional views advanced by a hard-to-please interpretative community are disenfranchised from their fellowship.

TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATION OF ROMANS 16:17

This study is an analysis of the traditional understanding of Romans 16:17 as well as an exegesis of the real intent of the statement by Paul. Unless one remembers that godly teachers have simply passed much of their theology on to them, then it is much more difficult to see the text as a window through which we can peer into the historical period. The inherited commentary on Romans 16:17 is employed by many Christians to explain away their behavior of alienation from other believers. The traditional position, so it appears, is based on a series of unverifiable arguments, which in turn function as assumptions, to the effect that the reading of the

text is upon the basis of one's own theological urgencies, not upon Paul's intended meaning. This "handed-down" view is associated with Dub McClish, allied with one of the most conservative elements within the Churches of Christ, in The Eighth Annual Spiritual Sword Lectureship. McClish asserts:

> This passage emphasizes the dependence of true unity upon doctrine. The concept of the possibility of scriptural unity on any basis that ignores or forfeits doctrinal truth must be rejected. There can be no heaven-oriented unity in the climate of doctrinal diversity. Scriptural unity surely involves mutual love between the parties concerned, but it requires far more than mere love. This passage states it plainly: where doctrines that differ from and are contrary to THE DOCTRINE are taught and received, the result is not unity, but "*divisions and occasions of stumbling.*" Such statements as "*It is not doctrine that unites us, it is love*," are not only unscriptural, they are totally anti-scriptural. The content of Romans 16:17 alone is sufficient to successfully challenge the insidious Ketcherside-Garrett doctrine of "*unity in diversity.*"[394]

The phrase—"doctrine"—as employed by McClish is in essence whatever he believes about certain Church of Christ dogma. Each fellowship—approximately twenty-five in number—interprets "doctrine" or "teaching" differently. The various orthodox bodies can never agree on what the "teaching" is that Paul addresses in this epistle to Rome. In this same vein of reasoning, Homer L. King (1892-1983), former editor of *Old Paths Advocate*, wrote an article in 1936 to condemn men like McClish for not abiding in "the teaching [**τὴν διδαχὴν**, *tēn didachēn*] you have learned" (Romans 16:17).[395] King wrote an article to justify his separation from Christians who use individual communion cups in the communion and participate in Sunday school. I personally knew this man, and he was, in my judgment, a great Christian man. He, like so many others, failed to examine the context. This chapter is a call to all God's people to reread this old text and view through new eyes.

King entitled his article, "Avoid Them." This heading is taken from the concluding remarks of Paul in this passage: "Keep away from them." With his mental concept of what it was all about, he had no choice other than to promote rejection of other believers who refused to conform to his beliefs associated with the one-cup and non-Sunday school persuasion. What had King learned from his misguided teachers? He learned that he should not use individual cups nor participate in Bible study classes for various ages. I, too, misapplied this Scripture for seventeen years until I learned to read in context. My uncle, E. H. Miller (1909-1989), taught me the traditional interpretation, which understanding is all he knew. His misunderstanding was not rebellion against God, but rather it was simply an honest mistake of the heart.

This essay by King had such an impact upon this movement that the current editor, his son (Don), republished this article forty-six years later (February 1982) and again in January 1992. The *Old Paths Advocate* (*OPA*) still uses the logic of King in their interpretation of Romans 16:17. This Scripture is called forth by the *OPA* fellowship to condemn men like McClish, but, on the other hand, McClish employs this same Scripture to clobber men like Carl Ketcherside (1908-1989) and Leroy Garrett (b. 1918). Again, as cited above, McClish says, "Romans 16:17 alone is sufficient to successfully challenge the insidious Ketcherside-Garrett doctrine of '*unity in diversity*'."

McClish and King, even though in different religious parties or interpretative communities within the Churches of Christ, employed this same Scripture with the same devastating result against those who would dare to differ with their own unique interpretative community. King's sectarian spirit, though not intentional, also comes through loud and clear as he "hauls over the coals" those with whom he disagrees:

> "What shall I do," some one inquires, "when we have a preacher or teacher present, who is not quite sound?" Let him be a good listener, until, if ever, he declares his loyalty. The same is true of those, whom you do not know. "They will not

[394]Dub McClish, "Greetings—Along With A Warning—To Those In Rome (Rom. 16:1-20)" in *The Book of Romans: The Eighth Annual Spiritual Sword Lectureship* (Ark: National Christian Press, 1983), 244. Even though I have never met Dub McClish, I still regard him as a child of God. He, like so many of us, is still bound to the traditions handed down to him by the church fathers. This chapter is designed to call attention to the need to reexamine old texts through new eyes.

[395]Homer L. King, "AVOID THEM," *Old Paths Advocate* 54, no. 2, reprint (February 1, 1982), 5. I do not believe his misapplication was rebellion against God, but rather it was simply an honest mistake of the heart and intellect.

> say anything about our differences in their teaching," says one. How do you know? If not publicly, they will privately, and beside you are not obeying the command given by Paul, viz, "'mark them' . . . and 'avoid them'" (Rom. 16:17. Homer L. King, OPA, Sept. 1, 1936.[396]

The above two citations from both McClish and King illustrate the dilemma Christians find themselves involved in when they disagree with other believers over doctrinal issues. As we peruse the various religious journals, we quickly discover "editor bishops" and "powerful preachers" lashing out at one another with Romans 16:17 in their arsenal of warfare Scriptures. McClish, as stated above, denounces what he calls "the insidious Ketcherside-Garrett doctrine of '*unity in diversity*.'" But what is there about this *unity in diversity* practice that is so abhorrent to him and to many other religious teachers?[397] This practice of accepting others with various viewpoints, according to McClish and King, is tantamount to denying that the Bible is the standard of authority. And, as a result of this perception of unity, the wrath of many godly men and women fall upon the necks of the dissidents who are equally godly in their walk with the Lord.

Again, what is this "insidious doctrine" advanced by the late Carl Ketcherside and the contemporary Leroy Garrett? It is the philosophy of the spirit of toleration for differences within the Christian community (church). Both Ketcherside and Garrett rejected the traditional interpretation, which interpretation wrought havoc within God's church. Both men called for toleration, or acceptance, in order to bring praise to God, which praise could only be achieved through the unity of the Sprit. On the other hand, McClish employed Romans 16:17 to condemn Ketcherside and Garrett and, with this Scripture, justified his right to "avoid" them.

Upon closer examination of the context of Romans 16:17, we soon discover that the arguments advanced by McClish as well as King do not hold up under closer scrutiny. Christians seldom ask, what does the text mean? For us to assign a meaning to the text that was not in the original meaning is to abuse the text. Both men, unconsciously, have distorted the text from its intended meaning. This falsification of this text, so it seems to me, does not appear to be deliberate on the part of either person. As interpreters of God's Word, we must never forget that every Christian is confronted daily with his theological heritage, his ecclesiastical traditions, his cultural norms, and his existential concerns.[398] Both Ketcherside and Garrett sensed this aspect of human nature, and, as a result of this realization, they published books under the following titles: *The Twisted Scriptures*[399] and *The Word Abused*.[400]

CARL KETCHERSIDE'S VIEW ON UNITY

Just what did Ketcherside teach about how we maintain a relationship with God? What did he teach concerning *unity in diversity*, which we all practice—whether mindful or unaware of such behavior? To be fair to Ketcherside, it seems only appropriate to let him express his own thoughts through his own writings. After a perusal, or examination, of his thoughts on unity, we can more fully grasp either the correctness or incorrectness of McClish's allegations about the so-called "insidious doctrine." Ketcherside understood that a mistake of the mind was not necessarily a result of a dishonest heart. In other words, we can be honestly mistaken, but still be loved by God at the same time (see also 1 Corinthians 8 for a biblical example of how one can be mistaken and still be loved by God).

Ketcherside goes right to the heart of the matter when he expresses his views about a misunderstanding of the text: "Men can be mistaken without being malicious. They can fail to comprehend without falling away from Jesus."[401] Again, Ketcherside (1908-1989) correctly points out: "One who loves the Lord Jesus Christ is

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[396]See Homer L. King, "AVOID THEM," *Old Paths Advocate* 54, no. 2, reprint (February 1, 1982), 5.

[397]For an in-depth study of unity in diversity, see chapter 6 ("Unity in Diversity" in this book (*Old Texts through New Eyes*), pp. 119-130

[398]See Gordon D Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* : A Guide to Understanding the Bible (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 57-71, for an excellent chapter on hermeneutical questions dealing with context and culture.

[399]Carl Ketcherside, *The Twisted Scriptures* (St. Louis: Mission Messenger, 1965; reprint, DeFuniak Springs, FL: Diversity Press, 1992).

[400]Leroy Garrett, *The Word Abused* (Texas: Leroy Garrett, 1975).

[401]Carl Ketcherside, "Analysis of Apostasy," *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 4 (April 1965): 51.

not an apostate simply because he cannot conscientiously concur with the orthodox position of a party."[402] Once more, he uses the following pregnant words to express the futility of advocating unity based upon conformity: "Any attempt to secure unity upon the basis of uniformity of knowledge or conformity in deductive or inferential processes (i.e., doctrinal interpretation) is doomed before it begins."[403]

This abnormal interpretation of Romans 16:17 is not just unique to McClish and King. This text is cited by many well-meaning Christians to castigate those who advance the belief of *unity in diversity* and, at the same time, to turn down fellowship with individuals who advocate that freedom from error is not a condition of salvation. Ketcherside sought to lay bare the text itself from traditions and sets forth his reason for espousing *unity in diversity* as the only reasonable position that anyone can champion without going contrary to the Word of God and common sense. Note for instance his following explanation for his belief in *unity in diversity*:

> Freedom from error is not a condition of salvation else all men would be damned. We are not saved by attainment to a certain degree of knowledge but by faith in Christ Jesus. It is by belief of facts related to him, and not by grasp of abstract truth, that we are justified before God. Certainly it is not by performance of meritorious deeds nor by legalistic conformity. When we postulate a program of justification by knowledge we hang ourselves on the gallows we have constructed to rid ourselves of others, unless we are prepared to make ourselves even more ridiculous by affirming that we know as much as God.[404]

Has God made salvation contingent upon absolute perfection in knowledge? An answer to this question is an unqualified "NO"! Eternal life is not conditioned upon an all-out mastery of the written Word of God. Does Christian unity call for unqualified perfection in knowledge of the Holy Scriptures? Again, the answer to this question must be "NO." The only kind of unity that individuals can share is *unity in diversity*. If pure understanding is essential to eternal life, no one could be saved. It is obvious to the thinking mind that within the Christian community there are babes, children, young men, and fathers in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Not only did Ketcherside see the foolishness of trying to make unity conditioned upon an out-and-out conformity, but, at the same time, one hundred and thirty years earlier, **Alexander Campbell (1788-1866), one of the founders of the Disciples of Christ, also dealt with the absurdity of thinking that unity could be based on anything other than faith in Jesus.** Campbell strips away all the extraneous matter and goes right to the heart of the problem of disunity among God's people. Consider the following penetrating analysis of unity as Campbell paints, with words, the predicament of modern men and women who wish to make opinion the basis of unity rather than the Gospel facts:

> Let every sect give up its opinions as a bond of union, and what will remain in common? The gospel facts alone. . . . Men have foolishly attempted to make the deductions of some great minds the common measure of all Christians. . . . It is cruel to excommunicate a man because of the imbecility of his intellect. I have been censured long and often for laying too much stress upon the assent of the understanding; but those who have most acrimoniously censured me, have laid much more stress upon the assent of the mind than I have ever done. I never did, at any time, exclude a man from the kingdom of God for a mere imbecility of intellect; or, in other words, because he could not assent to my opinions. . . . I will now show how they cannot make a sect of us. We will acknowledge all as Christians who acknowledge the gospel facts, and obey Jesus Christ.[405]

Campbell knew that it is redemption "in" and "through" Christ that makes us one, not correct understanding. He refused to eliminate a man from the kingdom of God for a condition of mental deficiency or feeble-mindedness. He accepted all as Christians who acknowledged the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of

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[402]Ibid.

[403]Carl Ketcherside, "Gospel and Doctrine," *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 2 (February 1965): 18.

[404]Ibid., 7.

[405]Alexander Campbell, "Millennium. No. II," *The Millennial Harbinger* 1, no. 4 (April 5, 1830): 13, 14. In spite of Campbell's desire to promote unity among the various denominations, his movement eventually developed into three distinctive movements: Disciples of Christ, Christian Churches, and the Churches of Christ. Each of these movements has divided into numerous factions.

Jesus, and who also submitted their lives to Him in conformity to His ethical standards as set forth in the Sermon on the Mount.

LEROY GARRETT POSTULATES UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Leroy Garrett (1918-2015), a Reformer and author within the Churches of Christ, expresses well the basic problem interpreters encounter by not applying Romans 16:17 to *unity in diversity*, which is exactly what Paul is teaching. The "teaching" in this passage deals with the spirit of toleration for differences within the Christian community, not doctrinal conformity before unity. Garrett, too, captures the essence of Paul's admonition to the Romans, when he writes: "The phrase 'contrary to the teachings you received' almost certainly refers to the teaching on *unity in spite of differences* which he had just laid before them in the letter, especially Ro. 14."[406]

Again, Garrett seems to be right in thinking that "It is clear enough that he is dealing with a behavioral problem more than a doctrinal one."[407] Paul is not saying, "It is my way or no way." The traditional Church of Christ interpretation is the spirit of "no toleration" for differences. This behavior is totally at odds with the context. McClish and King, as mentioned above, deny that Paul is teaching *unity in diversity*. "Unity in diversity" is what McClish calls "insidious Ketcherside-Garrett doctrine. Yet, this *unity in diversity* is the same teaching expounded by Paul in his first letter to Corinth (1 Corinthians 8) and to Rome (Romans 14-16). If Paul were here today, he would be rejected on the theological positions of McClish and King.

The practice of excommunicating individuals that dissent from one's assumptions is not new to the Christian world of Don McClish or the late Homer King. This same mindset is also found in the fourteen century. For example, **John Wycliffe** (1330-84), English theologian, translator and reformist, suffered abuse from the church for disagreeing with certain religious practices and beliefs. In the sixteen century, **John Knox** (1514-1572), Scottish clergy and leader of the Protestant Reformation, spent nineteen months as a galley slave for his faith. Then in the seventeen century, **John Bunyan** (1628-1688), Christian writer and preacher, spent twelve years in prison (1660-1672) for refusing to apply for a license to preach. And, but not least, in the sixteenth century, **William Tyndale** (1494-1536), Bible translator and Christian Martyr, was burnt for so-called heresy. What was his heresy? He translated the Bible from Greek into English.[408]

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[406]Leroy Garrett, "Mark Them Which Cause Divisions," *Restoration Review* 17, no. 1 (February 1975): 25.

[407]Ibid., 24.

[408]For earlier views and reactions toward the dissent, see John Foxe, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, reprint, 1980). Formerly this book was entitled *The Acts and Monuments,* first published on March 20, 1563. In his day executions occurred on a regular basis for holding different opinions from the established church. In the "Biographical Sketch," one senses the concern of Foxe for the intolerable condition in his day, page xii:

> In 1575 Foxe energetically sought to obtain the remission of the capital sentence in the case of two Dutch Anabaptists condemned to the stake for their opinions. He wrote to the Queen, Lord Burghley, and Lord Chief Justice Manson, pointing out the disproportion between the offence and the punishment, and deprecating the penalty of death in cases of heresy. A respite of a month was allowed, but both the Anabaptists perished.

See also Jock Purvis, *Fair Sunshine: Character Studies of the Scottish Covenanters* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982). This book is an outline on Scottish Covenant History in the 17th century. The atrocities committed against believers because they refused to conform to the established church are appalling. This book is sufficient to set the tone for the horrors perpetrated against other believers; it is mind-boggling; the following citation makes one shudder (page 69):

> The year 1685 was a terrible year in a terrible era. The Killing Time reeked reddest then, The author of Robinson Crusoe, Daniel Defoe, one of the most painstaking and sympathetic writers on the Covenanter, 'fixes on the barbarities of this year to support his opinion that the Scottish persecution was worse than that of the Roman Emperors and Popish Inquisitors.'

ALEXANDER CAMPBELL PUTS FORWARD UNITY IN DIVERSITY

One hundred and seventy-six years ago (1832), Alexander Campbell (1788-1866) confronted a religious movement that was split into many warring factions. None could agree on what was essential and what was non-essential for Christian unity among the various denominations. Christians, in his day, as well as our day, sought to make fellowship conditional upon unanimity of agreement upon doctrinal matters. As a result of this kind of mental gymnastics, he observed division on every street corner. He saw Christians throwing one another out of the synagogue because of differences over how to interpret a passage of Scripture.

Romans 16:17 was tossed about in his day as it is presently hurled about in our day. Thus, Alexander Campbell, too, dealt with the misapplication of this passage that was utilized to justify separation, or disconnection, from other equally God-fearing and sincere followers of Jesus. The amount of space and time taken here to review this particular controversy—*unity in diversity*—although considerable, is easily justified. The following quote from Campbell is a lengthy passage, but it has to be cited in full to appreciate his mature insight—an insight that many today do not possess. Campbell's words are pertinent and relevant for the Christian community that has turned into a war zone.

> The Pope and his angels preached from this text half a century, while Luther, Zwingli, Melanchthon, &c. were exposing the filthiness of the Mother of Harlots. As Luther gave the Pope no quarters, he wreaked his vengeance on the Reformers, denouncing them as heretics, schismatics, sowers of discord among brethren, haughty, self-willed, and contumacious[409] dignitaries.
>
> He learned that lesson from his predecessors, who denounced the Messiah and his Apostles by similar arguments. Jesus was not a good man, for he made division among the people; and the Apostles were heresiarchs,[410] for they turned the world upside down.
>
> Elijah, too, was a disturber of the peace of Israel; and Daniel greatly marred the harmony of the devout fraternity who paid court to Nebuchadnezzar. In short, from the time that Moses caused divisions in the kingdom of Pharaoh, down to the last Dover Association, this text, "Mark and avoid them that cause divisions," has never been unseasonable amongst the opponents of reform and of change; for as there can be no reformation without change—and as all who preach reformation preach a change, the consequence must be, that those who will not change, must, to justify themselves, denounce the reformers; and no text does this better than this—"*Mark them which cause divisions, and avoid them*."[411]

Christians still herald this text against anyone who seeks to call attention to a reevaluation of one hundred and fifty years of tradition. Just a perusal of the Church of Christ journals reveals the popularity of this text (Romans 16:17). If anyone questions the hand-me-down traditions from the forefathers, we hear the epithet—"Division Makers." Campbell correctly called attention to an illegal use of this citation to condemn the Reformers who sought to bring about change. The religious leaders in Jesus' day could also have quoted this Scripture against Jesus and His apostles. Why? Jesus and His apostles challenged the traditions of the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law. They were in modern parlance "change-agents."

TOLERATION AND FORBEARANCE ARE ESSENTIAL FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

Two reformers—Carl Ketcherside (1908-1989) and Leroy Garrett (1918-2015)—questioned the traditions of the Churches of Christ and their proof-texting of Scripture to substantiate their divisive spirit. One such Scripture they sought to put back into context dealt with Romans 16:17. This passage was used and is still

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[409]Stubbornly or willfully disobedient to authority: Rebellious.

[410]The founder of a heresy or the leader of a heretical sect; an originator or chief advocate of a heresy.

[411]Alexander Campbell, "Mark Them Who Cause Division," *Millennial Harbinger* 3 (5 November 1832"): 604. Underling of this text is mine (RDB).

used to hack to death anyone who dared/dares to question the strange and weird interpretations of a distinctive interpretative community. They knew that this abnormal interpretation attached to Romans 16:17 violated the general teachings of the New Testament (Ephesians 4:1-6) and the unity for which Jesus prayed in His priestly prayer (John 17).

Both Garrett and Ketcherside called for forbearance. This spirit of toleration for mental deficiency in God's Word is the crux of the so-called "insidious Ketcherside-Garrett doctrine of *unity in diversity*." McClish's cruel statement against these two men is based upon a faulty interpretation of Romans 16:17. *Unity in diversity* demands acceptance and allowances toward other believers—even with mistaken views. For us to understand more fully the mindset of Garrett, a citation from him should allow us to enter into his concern over the fracturing of Christ's body, which splintering is sinful. Garrett says,

> It is noteworthy that the apostle would turn to character traits (virtues) in his great appeal for unity in Eph. 4. He first "begs" the believers to lead a life worthy of their calling, which has more to do with their fruit than with their doctrine. . . . Partyism cannot forbear anyone whose teaching or behavior threatens it's very existence. . . . One thing is sure, in cultivating the grace of loving forbearance we are acknowledging that unity is something more than conformity or uniformity. Unity by its very nature is diverse, and in Christ we have the cohesive of love that binds everything together in perfect harmony. It is coercion that makes for conformity, but it is forbearance that makes for harmony.[412]

Garrett correctly points out that forbearance fosters harmony, but coercion demands conformity. The party spirit stresses submission. On the other hand, *unity in diversity* allows for leniency and mercy. Again, the words of Garrett are quite revealing as he seeks to explain his understanding of *unity in diversity* in his numerous essays dealing with various aspects of unity among God's people. We wonder if there is any other kind of unity other than *unity in diversity*. It is a truism that individuals can no more all think alike on every subject than they can all look alike. Garrett offers the following succinct observation: "It is silly to suggest that with all our diversity in degree of maturity, intellect, emotions, and circumstances of life, we can agree on everything or interpret the scriptures in precisely the same way."[413] Garrett continues his astute observation of his teaching on *unity in diversity*:

> All this bugaboo about how wrong the "unity in diversity" concept is only reveals how men can be blinded by Partyism. In the first place, any sane man who merely stops to think knows that there can be no unity except in diversity, for that is what unity means, whether in a family, a country or nature—it is a harmony of diverse parts. . . . But it is imperative that we realize that we are all in Jesus together in spite of these differences; and because we are in Jesus together we are sons of God together and brothers. Thank God, we are brother! We must accept each other as such even if we do meet separately.[414]

Garrett advances the belief that Christians are to receive one another in the same way that Jesus receives them to the glory of God—"warts and all." His belief system is patterned after Paul's teaching concerning *unity in* diversity. For example, Paul zeros in on this *unity in diversity* concept in his letter to the Romans:

> May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. (Romans 15:5-7)

Again, what is the context of Romans 16:17? Again, I remind the reader that this text is the culmination of what Paul stated in Romans 14 and 15. Listen to just a few of his remarks from Romans 14 about his insistence on *unity in diversity*:

> Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. [2] One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. [3] The man who eats everything must not look

[412]Leroy Garrett, "Forbearance and Unity," *Restoration Review* 15, no. 1 (January 1973): 13, 14.
[413]Leroy Garrett, "Can Two Walk Together," *Restoration Review* 17, no. 7 (September 1975): 124.
[414]Ibid., 124, 125.

down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. [4] Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. (Romans 14:1-4)

Once more, the writings of Paul to the Corinthians also reveal his insistence on the belief of *unity in diversity*, despite the opposite views of McClish and King. The Corinthians did not have it all together as far as Paul was concerned. Some believers wanted to coerce other believers into conformity. But, Paul sought to nip-in-the-bud the conformity mentality:

Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge.[a] Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. [2] The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. [3] But the man who loves God is known by God. [4] So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. [5] For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), [6] yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. [7] But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. [8] But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do. [9] Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. [10] For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? [11] So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. [12] When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. (1 Corinthians 8:1-12)

Within every Christian community, there are differences. Paul asserts human weakness when he writes in his summary of what he had just previously discussed in Chapters 8-12. Listen to him as he deals with knowledge in his Corinthian correspondence: "For we know in part and we prophesy in part" (13:9). As stated above, no two people can anymore think alike than they can all look alike. For individuals to always see eye-to-eye on every subject or biblical text is not humanly possible. The Christian writer John R. W. Stott (b. 1921), British Christian leader and Anglican clergyman and leader of the worldwide evangelical movement, has penned some compelling words that need to be heard by every child of God. He captures the very heart of *unity in diversity* when he writes: "Equally devout, equally humble, equally Bible-believing and Bible studying Christians or churches reach different conclusions must be considered secondary not primary, peripheral, not central."[415]

Jack Lewis, a scholar respected within and outside the Churches of Christ, expresses the basic problem over the traditional interpretation of Romans 16:17 espoused by many within the Churches of Christ: "The obligation, almost universally felt among our preaching brothers, to label other preaching brothers who hold positions thought to be erroneous, rest upon a misunderstanding of Romans 16:17."[416] When believers apply this text to other saints who do not concur with their comprehension, we cannot help but wonder if they have not allowed their deep-seated prejudice to shape their verdict before the evidence is even considered. In other words, their narrow-mindedness negates the possibility of grasping the intent of the text correctly.

Once more, Alexander Campbell is called upon since he recognized so well the impossibility of achieving unity based upon opinion. He laid bare the naked truth that salvation is based upon acceptance of Jesus, not correct judgment. The following quote is rather lengthy, but, in spite of its length, it is still worth reflecting upon for its profound truths:

The Apostle says, "There is one body, one spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one immersion, one God and Father of all." But no where is it said in the sacred book, There is one opinion. If however, unity of opinion were desirable, to attain it, we must give the greatest liberty of opinion; for though once theory with us, it is now matter of experience, that the more stress is laid upon unity of opinion, the less of it, and the more division; and the less regard paid to it, the less

[a] Or *"We all possess knowledge," as you say*

[415] John R. W. Stott, *Christ the Controversialist* (Illinois: InterVarsity, 1970), 44.

[416] Jack P. Lewis, *Exegesis of Difficult Passages* (Arkansas: Resource Publications, 1988), 112.

emphasis laid upon it, the more we will have of it. This is founded in a law of the human mind, on which it is unseasonable and unnecessary to expatiate[417]. . . .

Amongst Christians there is now, as there was at the beginning, a very great diversity in the knowledge of the Christian institution. There are babes, children, young men, and fathers in Christ now, as well as in the days of the Apostle John. This from the natural gifts of God, from the diversities of age, education, and circumstances is, unavoidable. And would it not be just as rational and as scriptural to excommunicate one another, because our knowledge is less or greater than any fixed measure, as for differences of opinion on matters of speculation? . . . In most instances the greatest error of which a brother can be guilty, is to study his Bible more than his companions—or, at least, to surpass them in his knowledge of the mystery of Christ.[418]

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

One cannot help but wonder what the real controversy is over concerning the acceptance of *unity in diversity* as a biblical principle. The fear is that this idea of unity opens the door to a wider fellowship than is generally allowed within most Churches of Christ. The nightmare is that this perception of diversity will unlock the door to believers that are not members of the denominational Church of Christ. Today, many religious leaders within the Churches of Christ advance the notion that only those who meet behind the label Church of Christ belong to the Lord's community, which they frequently call the "Lord's Church."

In the nineteenth-century, men such as **Barton Stone** (1772-1844) and the **Campbells** (**Alexander** [1788-1866] and **Thomas** [1763-1854]) did not hold such narrow-minded views about the Christian **ἐκκλησία** (commonly translated church). **Both Thomas and Alexander sought to bring about unity among all denominations.** It is also in this same vein that Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett also caught a glimpse of what *unity in diversity* means. In addition to this understanding, they also discovered what the word *ekklēsia* connotes in the New Testament writings. The result of these newfound truths opened the floodgates to the acceptance of other believers, that is, even those not associated with the Church of Christ denomination. Our attitude or understanding of the English word *church* contributes either unity or disunity toward one's perception of *unity in diversity*.

Garrett's consciousness of the meaning of the Greek word **ἐκκλησία** (*ekklēsia*, "assembly, congregation, church") caused him to see a wider meaning than just the ecclesiastical overtones normally associated with the English word *church*. This perception caused him to seek unity among all God's people. Through his writings, Garrett aspires to reestablish a true sensitivity to a more correct definition of the word *church* in light of Scripture. His comments in this area are concise and revealing.

> We use "church" because it is so commonly employed, and it is likely to remain with us. What is important is that we give the term no *institutional* meaning. The church of the New Covenant scriptures is nothing more than the body of Christ, consisting of all those who are "in Christ," irrespective of the claims of sects and denominations. . . . It is noteworthy that every reformation effort has sought to restore the integrity of the nature of the church. Luther challenged the hierarchy's claim to be the authoritative church, insisting that the church is the people of God and not simply the clergy. Thus restoring the concept of the priesthood of all believers. Thus emerged "the reformed tradition" which has seen the church as the fellowship of all believers.[419]

Both Garrett and Ketcherside postulated that the people of God are larger than the denominational Church of Christ. Many years before these men came to a proper awareness of the true nature of the ekklhsia, there were others who had already addressed the correct makeup of the church. For example, Barton Stone (1772-1844) wrote: "We will, that this body die, be dissolved, and sink into union with the Body of Christ at large, for there is one Body, and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling."[420] Stone

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[417]To speak or write in detail about.

[418]Alexander Campbell, "To Mr. William Jones, of London. Letter IV," *Millennial Harbinger* 6, no. 3 (March 1835): 111, 112.

[419]Leroy Garrett, "Introduction," *Restoration Review* 15, no. 1 (January 1973): 2, 3.

[420]See Thomas Campbell and Barton W. Stone, *Declaration and Address [1809] and the Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery [1804]* (St. Louis: Mission Messenger, 1955, reprint), 17.

considered the various denominations of his day as a part of the "Body of Christ at large." Campbell, too, attempted to restore the biblical concept of the church. He wrote:

> But we have yet a broader, a stronger, and, perhaps, a still more striking and convincing view of the duty of all the individual churches in a province, a state, or a kingdom, to co-operate as one church, in all matters of public interest and property to the whole Kingdom of Jesus Christ in a nation, in an empire, or in the world. This is clearly ascertained from one most palpable and most interesting fact. This fact is, that the word *church*, in the singular number, is, by sacred and apostolic usage, often made to represent all the churches in a nation, an empire, or in the world. It is a term used as a commensurate with the whole body of Christ, or the entire community of all the faithful on earth. Hence, there is but one kingdom of Christ, one body of Christ, or one church of Christ on earth. The word *church*, by reference to its occurrences in the New Testament, indicates the whole Christian community on earth.[421]

Again, Garrett, too, points out with justice: "It is a family that we must come to see the church. It is not an institution or organization, but a family community of brothers and sisters."[422] When we come to possess a more accurate understanding of the word *church*, then this awareness should help to promote the spirit of unity among God's family. Within the body of Christ, there will always be variation of opinions concerning doctrinal matters. This factor is, no doubt, one reason that Paul forces home this point about the Spirit's unity in the epistle to the Ephesians. Paul carefully enumerates reasons for maintaining the unity created by the Holy Spirit:

> As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 **Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit** through the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:1-6)

Paul's words, "bearing with one another in love" and "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit" indicate that diversity existed within that body of believers. As stated earlier, Paul also calls attention to this mixture of beliefs within the congregation at Rome. Since there is only "one body," it is imperative that Christians seek to support unity in spite of differences. Diversity allows for defective understanding. For one to be in fellowship with another Christian, this consciousness and practice of fellowship does not indicate total endorsement of the other person's belief system. Christians are one because they have the same Father, not because they have comprehended every Scripture unerringly. Fellowship and endorsement are not one and the same. We are in fellowship with God, but who is so foolish as to advance the notion that God endorses everything we believe and do. We also can be in fellowship with other Christians and not endorse everything the other person believes.

FELLOWSHIP AND PERFECT AGREEMENT

For some, so it appears, before fellowship commences, one's insight of God's Revelation must be perfect, at least in what many consider to be essentials. But what are the essentials? The fundamentals vary. The nuts and bolts depend on which party you are aligned with. Without an understanding of *unity in diversity*, we cannot fully grasp the full significance of Romans 16:17. Before we embark upon the context of Romans 16:17, it is necessary to reflect upon the distinction between God's written Revelation and our interpretation of God's Holy Word.

Many cannot distinguish between *interpretation* and *Revelation* itself. The religious leaders in Jesus' day also failed to discern the difference between God's Word and tradition. Interpretation is what individuals think God meant by what He said. On the other hand, Revelation is what God says. The two are not synonymous. We should never equate our interpretation of God's Revelation as the Word of God itself. Is our connection with God dependent upon complete exactness in knowledge? If so, then no one has union with God.

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[421]Alexander Campbell, "Church Organization—No. IV" *Millennial Harbinger*, fourth series, 3, no. 6 (June 1853): 303.
[422]Leroy Garrett, "The Catholicity of the Church," *Restoration Review* 15, no. 3 (March 1973): 45.

Is our bond, or relationship, with God conditional upon our acceptance of Jesus as Lord in our life? If so, then we can have relationship with Him. Again, is our association with God conditional upon exactness in knowledge? How do we stand in God's presence?

Is it justification by faith in the finished work of Christ upon Calvary, or is it justification through flawless discernment of God's written Revelation? Should we make a test of fellowship out of spiritual discernment or digestion? Is there a difference between Gospel and doctrine? Is there a difference between faith and knowledge? Is it the Gospel that brings us into being? Or is rebirth a result of complete comprehension of doctrine? Are not teachings (doctrines) of Christ for growth and well-being? Can Christians always think alike on every subject? Can any two individuals upon earth attain to an identical degree of knowledge about everything at the same point in time? Answers to these questions should assist us in arriving at a better grasp of Romans 16:17 without being so dogmatic and factious.

We should always read with discrimination in order to pick out the most theologically sound thinkers if we wish to emulate them in their quest for Christian unity for which Jesus prayed. Just a perusal of the writings of Ketcherside and Garrett makes us conscious that these two men fall into this category of sound thinkers. Both men constantly, in their writings, call attention to context, context, context, and context. It is always context that determines the meaning. Ketcherside has penned one of the most thought provoking articles that cuts through the maze of illogical thinking in order to grasp the very heart of what fellowship is all about. He is perfectly right, as stated earlier, when he insists that

> Those who were in Christ in the days of the apostles were in error on many points. They were mistaken about a lot of things but they were not charged with "preaching another gospel." Freedom from error is not a condition of salvation else all men would be damned. We are not saved by attainment to a certain degree of knowledge but by faith in Christ Jesus. It is by belief of facts related to him, and not by grasp of abstract truth, that we are justified before God. Certainly it is not by performance of meritorious deeds nor by legalistic conformity. When we postulate a program of justification by knowledge we hang ourselves on the gallows we have constructed to rid ourselves of others, unless we are prepared to make ourselves even more ridiculous by affirming that we know as much as God.[423]

Ketcherside captures the very essence of the life-force of the Roman letter. Romans 16:17 is the culmination of the previous fifteen chapters. One must not interpret this text in isolation. The above citations from Ketcherside and Garrett are in harmony with the teachings of the Book of Romans. We can only conclude from reading this famous Epistle that our level of knowledge is not the determining factor in our fellowship with God, but rather it is justification by faith. Salvation is a gift, and, since it is a gift, then we are to put forth every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

ANALYSIS AND APPLICATION OF ROMANS 16:17 IN CONTEXT

> Like any growth, development may be healthy or it may be malignant; discerning the difference between these two kinds of growth requires constant research into the pathology of traditions. But it is healthy development that keeps a tradition both out of the cancer ward and out of the fossil museum.[424]

What is the context of Romans 16:17? Some of the Romans were basing fellowship upon a correct interpretation of all doctrinal issues—*unity in conformity*. Paul refutes this position of absolute perfection in knowledge as a condition of fellowship. In Chapters 14 and 15, he deals with imperfection in knowledge within the Christian community. How should we react to the immature in the faith? How should we react toward those whose belief system was not correct in every detail? In these two chapters, Paul discusses how Christians are to respond to differences within the church at Rome.

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[423]Carl Ketcherside, "Another Gospel," *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 1 (January 1965): 6-7.

[424]Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984). 60.

Paul goes right to the very core of disagreements and how to deal with the individual whose knowledge is inadequate. I urge each person to stand upon the threshold of the Romans as you read the words of Paul: "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (Romans 15:7). This Scripture sets forth the truth that God accepted them with "warts and all." Thus, Paul is saying that we are to imitate God in our relationship with one another. Prior to this statement though, he encourages them to "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters" (14:1).

Now, what happens if an individual refuses to accept the above admonitions and seeks to force his belief on others to the point of division? Paul then summarizes his reaction to the factious person: "I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them" (16:17). This statement by Paul does not condemn men like Ketcherside and Garrett, but rather, this verse is a rebuke to all Christians who refuse to acknowledge the teachings of Paul in Romans 14 and 15. What had they learned? They had learned *unity in diversity*.

This emphasis upon *unity in diversity* is also the subject of the Ephesian letter: "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). This is the same kind of instructions that Paul charges the Christians at Rome to practice: "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 15:5-6).

Disputable Matters in the Roman Church

Without consulting the context of Romans 16:17, we can postulate bizarre interpretations. Prior to Paul's appeal "to watch out for those who cause divisions" (16:17), he instructs the saints to "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters" (14:1). The context tends to indicate that some believers wanted to force their so-called correct interpretation (some were right and some were wrong in their understanding) on other Christians. Some, in the congregation at Rome, insisted upon everyone submitting to their views. Paul writes with penetrating words, "Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind" (14:5). There is a vast difference between in "my mind" and your "own mind." In other words, one's conviction must be based upon his or her own conclusions, not someone else's beliefs:

> So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. [23] But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin. (14:22-23)

There was a dispute over the eating of meats and vegetables: "One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables" (14:2). Paul is declaring that no one should create division over his or her personal understanding of meats or vegetables or days. It is in this same vein that Paul writes, "He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God" (14:6). Paul sets forth the words of the Holy Spirit to refute the practice of enforcing conformity: "Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand" (14:4). Again, Paul widens this position by reminding them: "Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind" (14:5). If believers were not willing to abide by this spirit of toleration, then Paul utters,

> I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. [18]For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people. (16:17-18)

Paul's admonition is: "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves" (15:1). Those who cite Romans 16:17 to justify their separation from other believers are the very ones that Paul is warning the believers to keep an eye on. It is also in this same vein that Paul advises Titus:

"Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned" (Titus 3:10-11). It is very difficult for Christians to apply the Scriptures correctly when it comes to their "pet theories" concerning communion cups, Sunday school, grape juice or wine as the drink element in the Lord's Supper, acappella singing, instrumental music, Sunday collection, and so on. Making allowances for the beliefs of others is a part of the "teaching you have learned" (Romans 16:17).

Disputable Matters in the Corinthian Church

The church in Corinth experienced the same difficulties that the church did in Rome. In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he addresses the differences within the body of Christ. The problem he faces is the concern of perfection in one's knowledge. This Epistle concedes that knowledge of absolute truth is relative. He is not saying that truth is relative, but rather, that one's brainpower of total truth is relative. In other words, no one understands perfectly. Paul tackles the question of flawless knowledge head-on: "The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know" (1 Corinthians 8:2).

As we reflect upon this statement of Paul, anyone in his or her right mind will concede that this imperfection in knowledge is still with humanity. How many Christians know everything as they "ought to know"? Why do individuals purchase books to study? Why do Churches of Christ establish educational institutions to train preachers? Why do other denominations establish educational institutions? Is it not because people do not know everything as they "ought to know"? Yet, in spite of this testimonial, Paul admits that knowledge is not totally absent from the minds of men and women: "We know that we all possess knowledge" (8:1).

In fact, Paul has to deal with believers who think that they know it all. Christians sometimes feel that because of their superior knowledge that they are just a "notch above" the others. He calls attention to the dangers that lurk behind the attitude of "I know." Listen to Paul as he cautions the Christians about knowledge: "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up" (8:1). Yes, Paul is saying, it is true that we all have knowledge, but knowledge can puff one up. The question that confronts everyone is: Does God know the individual whose knowledge is defective? Is God concerned about the hearts of men and women? Or, is God just concerned about our being able to cross every "t" and to dot every "i"?

Again, Paul, through the Holy Spirit, reveals the mind of God: "The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. **But the man who loves God is known by God**" (8:2-3). Paul is saying that God loves the person whose knowledge is incomplete if he or she loves God. We may not be accurate in our thinking on every point, but love is the determinative factor in God's acceptance of us: "the man who loves God is known by God" (8:3). What Paul is saying to the Corinthians is the same as "the insidious Ketcherside-Garrett doctrine of '*unity in diversity*.'" In spite of McClish's negative comments about these two men, nevertheless, both men were endeavoring to honor the words of Holy Scripture.

Before concluding this analysis of Paul's thinking in his letter to Corinth, it would be helpful to pursue his line of reasoning for his beginning statements about knowledge being relative. Paul fully grasps the dilemma of perfect knowledge versus one's relationship with God. In Chapter 8 of First Corinthians, he reveals what some of the issues were over:

> So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. [5] For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), [6] yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. [7] But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. [8] But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do. (8:4-8)

This eighth chapter of First Corinthians is *unity in diversity*. Within this twenty-first century, there are very few Churches of Christ that would welcome Paul in their congregations to address the assembly. In fact,

there would be very few Church of Christ universities that would allow Paul to teach in their midst. He would be accused of *liberalism* and *digression*. Why? He believed in *unity in diversity*. Are the individuals whose knowledge was deficient about God still brothers and sisters in Christ as discussed by Paul in the Book of Romans and the Book of First Corinthians? Should they have been thrown out of the synagogue for famine of knowledge? Were they liberals and digressives? Was God concerned about these persons who stilled loved him, in spite of undersupplied information? What does Paul say about their condition? Listen to him as he reveals the mind of God concerning imbecility of intellect:

> Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. [10] For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? [11] So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. [12] When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. [13] Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall. (8:9-13)

Has God's attitude changed toward those who love Him? Do we sin against Christ when we become a stumbling block to the weak brother or sister? Christians who are not willing to make allowances for imperfection in knowledge for the "weak brother" are the ones to whom Paul speaks in Romans 16:17: "I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them." Again, *unity in diversity* is the thrust of Paul's discussion of differences in the church at Rome and Corinth and Ephesus. It is appropriate once more to turn to the principles advanced in the writings of Garrett and Campbell.

LEROY GARRETT AND ALEXANDER CAMPBELL ON UNITY IN DIVERSITY

These two men—Leroy Garrett and Alexander Campbell—addressed this principle of *unity in diversity* throughout their writings. The principles they advanced—Garrett still advances—were and are based upon the writings of Paul. Hopefully, this repetition may be pardoned here since the mind of man is leavened by the traditions of the church, which still prevails in Christendom, by Christians who undermine the teachings of God in this area in order to maintain doctrinal purity of approximately one hundred and fifty years of rituals in a so-called worship ceremony. It is fitting to call Garrett to the scene once more to hear his explanation of Romans 16:17 in context, which analysis has brought the wrath, the anger, the rage, and the fury of the established church against him with all the hatred one can muster.

> The phrase "contrary to the teachings you received" almost certainly refers to the teaching on unity in spite of differences which he had just laid before them in the letter, especially Ro. 14. . . . The truth is that we can hold such differences and still be one. This is because we are in the fellowship with Jesus together. It is not doctrines that make us one. . . . Those who insist that we line up on their opinions, or else suffer their wrath and oppression, are really the ones to mark and avoid, in view of the real meaning of Ro. 16:17.[425]

When Christians seek to regulate unity upon unconditional unanimity of agreement, then no unity can exist within the body of Christ. As we peruse the religious journals within the Churches of Christ, we soon discover that no two people are in total harmony on every doctrinal belief. Alexander Campbell, in his consciousness of differences in mental acumen, put it succinctly for all believers:

> Amongst Christians there is now, as there was at the beginning, a very great diversity in the knowledge of the Christian institution. There are babes, children, young men, and fathers in Christ now, as well as in the days of the Apostle John. This, from the natural gifts of God, from the diversities of age, education, and circumstances, is unavoidable. And would it not be just as rational and as scriptural to excommunicate one another, because our knowledge is less or greater than any fixed measure, as for differences of opinion on matters of speculation? . . . In most instances the

[425]Leroy Garrett, "Mark Them Which Cause Divisions," *Restoration Review* 17, no. 2 (February 1975): 25.

> greatest error of which a brother can be guilty, is to study his Bible more than his companions—at least, to surpass them in his knowledge of the mystery of Christ.[426]

Campbell calls attention to something that is already well known. It goes almost without saying that in the body of Christ, there will always be infants, children, young men, and fathers. Every child of God is at a different level of knowledge. The saints are to grow in knowledge and in favor with God. There will never be "one opinion," however much desired. This plea for unity is the crux of the so-called "insidious Ketcherside-Garrett doctrine of '*unity in diversity.*'" Campbell, Ketcherside, and Garrett sought to correct the misapplication of Romans 16:17, which fostered and still advances dissection within the camp of God's citizens. Within the Church of Christ denomination alone, the divisions number twenty-five or more warring factions. In addition to this once united body of believers, one is also confronted with other denominations that are also divided into hundreds of aggressive splinter groups.

CONCLUSION

One of the major objectives of this chapter is to assist believers in dropping their sectarian spirit and learning to accept those for whom Christ died and for whom He accepted. The question that confronts us is: Does anyone have 20/20 vision? When we read Romans 16:17 without spectacles, we quickly become conscious that the demand for complete agreement in all doctrinal matters is not under consideration, but rather the making of allowances for the weak. Believers are one in Jesus—not because they see every Scripture exactly alike, but rather, because they are reconciled to God through the sacrificial Atonement of Jesus. God's children can no more see alike on every subject than they can all look alike.

Paul's numerous letters reveal that salvation is not contingent upon absolute perfection in knowledge, but rather upon trust in Jesus as Lord. He stresses two essential truths throughout the Book of Romans: (1) salvation by faith "in" and "through" Jesus, not by works, and (2) allowances for imperfection in knowledge over issues that do not affect our salvation. If we do not allow for imperfection in knowledge and accept the brother or sister whose knowledge is deficient, then, we are not adhering to the teaching we have learned (16:17). Absolute freedom from error is not a condition of salvation; else all men and women would be damned. All error is error but not all error will condemn one's soul; else no one could be saved. All truth is true but not all truth is essential to deliverance from damnation; else all men and women would be lost.

A careful reading of the context of Romans 16:17 indicates that Paul's statement is about those who refuse to abide by his principles of toleration, not doctrinal purity. In this verse, Paul is seeking to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace by enduring the weak. This Scripture is one of the most abused Scriptures within the Churches of Christ. This study seeks to look at an old text through new eyes. As a result, this in-depth study sets forth an interpretation that is based upon the context, not one's presuppositions. In making this judgment, we must not conclude that Christians who misappropriate this text in order to justify their separation from other believers are not Christians. But their sincerity does not make them right, and it has caused untold suffering among God's people. My reason for such a lengthy explanation of this text is to help bring about unity for which our Lord prayed as recorded in John 17.

In spite of the negative overtones associated with the names Ketcherside and Garrett, nevertheless, both of these men sought to prevent individuals from creating division within the body of Christ by laying bare the naked truth of God's Word from the traditions of men and women. These two men called for God's people to learn how to reevaluate and reinterpret what has been handed down through the centuries. In other words, they wanted God's children not to confuse one's interpretation with the text itself. Many Christians are so accustomed to reading the Bible as they have been taught by generations of godly interpreters that any questioning of the traditional interpretation appears to be a questioning of Scripture itself. The hand-me-down

[426]Alexander Campbell, "To Mr. William Jones, of London, Letter IV," *Millennial Harbinger* 7, no. 3 (March 1835): 112.

practices in the church have made it difficult, if not impossible, for many Christians to read the Bible correctly.[427]

If we wish to comprehend the words of Paul in Romans 16:17, we must reread Chapters 14 and 15 of this book for the context of 16:17. Paul pleads for toleration on the part of those who sought to make their understanding the criterion by which one determined one's standing before God. Yet, Paul contradicted this philosophy. Listen to Paul once more as he enumerates his thoughts—thoughts given by the Holy Spirit:

- Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. (14:1)
- Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. (14:4)
- Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. (14:5b)
- Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. (15:7)

Paul enumerates the teaching they had learned in Romans 14 and 15. The immediate context of 16:17 is found in the two preceding chapters. Paul sets forth the spirit of unity, that is to say, the spirit of toleration for differences within the Christian community. As Christians, we need to reexamine old texts through new eyes.

The next chapter (15) discusses Uzzah and the Ark of the Covenant. This chapter analyzes the misuse of this well-known story in order to continue to promote divisions among countless Christians. This narrative is used in an illegal way to promote justification for separation from other believers who do not subscribe to a so-called pattern theology of worship. Pattern theology holds to the view that God has ordained a certain blueprint that individuals are to practice when they come together on Sunday morning for public glorification of the One who sent His Son to die for us. Generally, the model is associated with five-acts of prearranged rituals—ceremonies that have to be performed in a precise manner in order for devotion to be true and not in vain.

The analogy between ***then*** and ***now*** is that since God killed Uzzah for reaching out and touching the Ark of the Covenant then God will also reach out and destroy anyone who violates one of the so-called prescribed rituals to be acted upon on Sunday morning. One of the problems in this scenario is that God has not ordained, or designed, a worship ceremony with five formal procedures, which actions are outlined in Holy Scripture. One is hard-pressed to find such instructions in the New Covenant teachings.

The story of Uzzah and the Ark of the Covenant deals with Uzzah's disregard for God's holiness. He is not the only one that suffered death for his neglect of God's holiness. The story of Uzzah is called forth by some Christians to condemn other Christians who use instrumental music in praise to God in the assembly of the saints. Some within the Churches of Christ employ this scenario to denounce those believers who use individual communion cups in the observance of the Lord's Supper. The list is almost without number. Chapter 15 seeks to set forth the historical circumstances surrounding this story about God's holiness and His presence.

[427]I am deeply indebted to Justo and Catherine Gonzalez for much insight concerning the effect of tradition upon one's handling of Holy Scripture. See Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990).

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Uzzah and the Ark of the Covenant

The story of Uzzah is well known among Christians from every denomination. The Churches of Christ though, as a whole, utilize this story in a very unique way to illustrate the severity of God when we violate one of the so-called five sacred acts of worship as interpreted by various Christians within the twenty-five or more divisions in this once united body of believers. This narrative is relied upon to demonstrate that if we employ the instrument in praise to God in the gathering of His people on Sunday morning, God will zap us with eternal punishment. This story is also cited to frighten Christians who use individual communion cups in the observance of the Lord's Supper. We are taught to abandon such practices; else God will condemn us to an eternal burning hell. This same Scripture is also utilized against Christians who participate in Bible studies on Sunday morning for various age groups.

It is not uncommon for many saints within the twenty-five (or more) divisions within the Churches of Christ to lay claim to this Scripture as their own unique property in order to condemn those outside their particular fellowship. Before I analyze this most abused passage in Second Samuel (6:1-15), it would be helpful to observe something of the Ark's colorful history in order to set the background for a proper interpretation and application to this much ill-treated text. This background study demonstrates that Uzzah's mistake lies in his failure to understand God's presence and holiness associated with the Ark of the Covenant. His death is not the only death associated with God's Ark.

Just a perusal of the Scriptures reveals a very colorful history of the Ark that puts fear into the hearts of so many people. This study is not designed to discuss the covering (mercy-seat) on the Ark of the Covenant. My purpose in this in-depth study is to arrive at the reason for Uzzah's death in what appears to be a trivial thing to the modern-day reader. Hopefully, this analysis will keep Christians from doing the foolish thing they often do, that is, to employ this Scripture as a means of castigating those who disagree with many of their treasured viewpoints. Robert Stein, a world-renowned scholar of the synoptic Gospels, captures the very heart of a correct intellectual sensitivity of determining the true meaning of a Scripture within its own context:

> The understanding of a text involves the correct mental perception of a text's meaning. Another way of saying this is that understanding involves a correct grasp of the pattern of meaning willed by the author. Since there is a single meaning that the author willed, each individual who understands this meaning will have the same mental grasp of the author's pattern of meaning. Some understandings may be more complete than others because of a greater perception of the various implications involved, but, if an understanding is correct, it must have the same mental grasp of the author's meaning as any other understanding. Thus, although one person's understanding of meaning may be greater or more exhaustive than another's (because of a greater awareness of the various implication involved), every correct mental grasp of the author's meaning, or understanding, will be the same.[428]

[428]Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 49.

GOD'S HOLINESS AND THE ARK OF GOD

God speaks to Moses and informs him about the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25:10-22). One significant thing about this Ark is that God tells Moses that He will meet and speak to him from between the two cherubim that are over the Ark of the Testimony (25:22). Thus, the Ark of the Covenant is extremely holy. We cannot help but recall Moses' encounter with God from the burning bush (3:1-6). When Moses, after hearing God speak to him from within the burning bush, approached God, He warned him, "Do not come any closer" (3:5). Why? Well, listen to God's reason: "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground" (3:5).

The holiness of God is involved in this narrative about Uzzah and God's Ark. But before we embark upon this particular narrative in which Uzzah discounts the holiness of God, perhaps, it would be helpful to read about another encounter in which God warned the Israelites about His holiness. The LORD said to Moses, "I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you" (19:9). And, as a result of this coming encounter, God further instructed Moses to speak to the children of Israel:

> And the LORD said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes [11]and be ready by the third day, because on that day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. [12]Put limits for the people around the mountain and tell them, 'Be careful that you do not go up the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. [13]He shall surely be stoned or shot with arrows; not a hand is to be laid on him. Whether man or animal, he shall not be permitted to live.' Only when the ram's horn sounds a long blast may they go up to the mountain." (Exodus 19:10-13)

When God commissioned Isaiah, he exclaims,

> I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. [2]Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. [3]And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." [4]At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. [5]"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." (Isaiah 6:1-4)

Is it any wonder that Isaiah cried: '"Woe to me!' I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty"' (6:5).

SOME HISTORICAL ENCOUNTERS WITH THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

Instructions about the Handling of the Ark of the Covenant

Moses, in the Book of Numbers, gave instructions concerning the handling of the Ark of the Covenant. Aaron and his sons were assigned certain duties toward the Ark when the camp was to move: "Aaron and his sons are to go in and take down the shielding curtain and cover the ark of the Testimony with it. Then they are to cover this with hides of sea cows, spread a cloth of solid blue over that and put the poles in place" (Numbers 4:5-6). Following this activity in preparation for the move, Aaron and his sons were to call in the Kohathites.

God informed Moses and Aaron that the "Kohathites are to come to do the carrying. But **they must not touch the holy things or they will die**. The Kohathites are to carry those things that are in the Tent of Meeting" (4:15). Not only were the Kohathites not allowed to touch the holy things, which included the Ark of the Covenant, but they were not even allowed to look at the holy things in the Tabernacle: "the Kohathites must not go in to look at the holy things, even for a moment, or they will die" (4:20). Again, we are reminded of the holiness of God.

The furniture of the Tabernacle could not be hauled on carts, only carried on their shoulders. The disassembled parts of the Tabernacle could be placed on carts; the Tabernacle proper weighed a few tons. The tribes of Israel contributed six covered carts and twelve oxen to handle the transportation of the Tent of Meeting (7:3). Moses gave "two carts and four oxen to the Gershonites, as their work required, and he gave four carts and eight oxen to the Merarites, as their work required" (4:7-8), but "Moses did not give any to the Kohathites, because they were to carry on their shoulders the holy things, for which they were responsible" (4:9).

The Ark of the Covenant Played an Important Role Among the Children of Israel

The Ark of the Covenant accompanied the children of Israel in all their wilderness wanderings (Exodus 40:33-38). Following the death of Moses (1406 BC), Joshua assumed leadership (Joshua 1:1-9), and the Ark of the Covenant accompanied them in their entrance into Canaan (Joshua 4).[429] For example, the Ark of the Covenant went with the Israelites into battle against Jericho: "Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets" (Joshua 6:4).

The writer of First Samuel also mentions the Ark of the Covenant in Shilo (1 Samuel 4:3). Since the Israelites had just lost a battle (4000 foot soldiers died) with the Philistines (4:2), they, as a result of this loss, sent men to Shilo to bring up the Ark of the Covenant (4:3). Once the Ark of the Covenant was in their camp, then, the Israelites once more went into battle with the Philistines (4:5-10). During the battle, the Philistines killed over thirty thousand foot soldiers (4:10) and captured the Ark of the Covenant (4:11).

Death and the Ark of the Covenant

The death of Uzzah was just one death among many deaths that resulted when certain individuals came into contact with the Ark of the Covenant. The Philistines suffered countless loss of life as a result of God's Ark being in their possession. The presence of the Ark in their territory brought nothing but terror. As a result of this panic, they, in an attempt to escape the terrible effects (1 Samuel 5),[430] moved the Ark from city to city. After the Philistines captured the Ark, they took it from Ebenezer to Ashdod (5:1). But the Scriptures reveal that "The LORD's hand was heavy upon the people of Ashdod and its vicinity; he brought devastation upon them and afflicted them with tumors. When the men of Ashdod saw what was happening, they said, 'The ark of the god of Israel must not stay here with us, because his hand is heavy upon us and upon Dagon our god'" (5:6-8).

The people of Ashdod sent the Ark to Gath (5:8), but again, the people of Gath also experienced God's heavy-hand upon the city: "But after they had moved it, the LORD's hand was against that city, throwing it into a great panic. He afflicted the people of the city, both young and old, with an outbreak of tumors" (5:9). The Ark was then sent to Ekron (5:10). By this time, the word had gotten out about the calamities that had fallen upon Ashdod and Gath. The writer of First Samuel states: "As the ark of God was entering Ekron, the people of Ekron cried out, 'They have brought the ark of the god of Israel around to us to kill us and our people'" (5:10). They called the rulers together and requested that they send the Ark of the God of Israel away (5:11).

Why such an urgent meeting and demand by the citizens of Ekron? Listen again to the people as they call attention to their condition: "So they called together all the rulers of the Philistines and said, 'Send the ark of the god of Israel away; let it go back to its own place, or it will kill us and our people'" (5:11). Had any died as a result of the Ark in their city? The writer of First Samuel confirms what the people were saying: "For death had filled the city with panic; God's hand was very heavy upon it. Those who did not die were afflicted with tumors, and the outcry of the city went up to heaven" (5:11-12). Because of God's heavy hand of punishment, the Ark was returned to Israel (6:1-12). The Ekronites placed the Ark on a "new cart ready, with two cows that

[429]The Book of Joshua covers twenty-one years of history (1406-1385 BC).

[430]The Book of First Samuel covers a period of ninety years—from the birth of Samuel to the death of Saul in 1010 BC.

have calved and have never been yoked. Hitch the cows to the cart, but take their calves away and pen them up" (6:7).

The two cows went toward the territory of Israel—Beth Shemesh (6:9). Upon its arrival in Beth Shemesh, the people chopped up the wood of the cart and sacrificed the two cows as a burnt offering to the Lord (6:14). Then, the Levites took down the Ark of the Lord, as well as the gold objects sent with the Ark, and placed the Ark and gold object on the large rock (6:15) where the cows stopped (6:14). But the people of Beth Shemesh also experienced death: "But God struck down some of the men of Beth Shemesh, putting seventy of them to death because they had looked into the ark of the LORD" (6:19).

Uzzah and the Ark of the Covenant

Second Samuel records the episode of Uzzah and the Ark of the Covenant (2 Samuel 6:6-7).[431] In this book we find information related to David's bringing the Ark of God to Jerusalem (6:1-19). Uzzah may well have belonged to the clan of the Kohathites.[432] As stated earlier, God informed Moses: "After Aaron and his sons have finished covering the holy furnishings and all the holy articles, and when the camp is ready to move, the Kohathites are to come to do the carrying. But **they must not touch the holy things or they will die**. The Kohathites are to carry those things that are in the Tent of Meeting" (Numbers 4:15). The Kohathites were not to be cut off from the Levites "So that they may live and not die when they come near the most holy things, do this for them: Aaron and his sons are to go into the sanctuary and assign to each man his work and what he is to carry, but **the Kohathites must not go in to look at the holy things, even for a moment, or they will die**" (4:19-20).

When Uzzah touched the Ark of the Covenant, God's anger burned against him for "his irreverent act" (2 Samuel 6:7). This Ark was so sacred that even the high priest was prohibited from entering the Most Holy Place of the Tabernacle that housed the Ark of the Covenant except on the Day of Atonement: "The LORD said to Moses: 'Tell your brother Aaron not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die, because I appear in the cloud over the atonement cover'" (Leviticus 16:2). Whenever we encounter the Ark of the Covenant, we encounter the presence of God. Uzzah could not plead ignorance. He committed an act of treason against God. His touching the Ark of God was an act of clear rebellion and disregard for God's holiness and presence.

Holiness and the Believer

Many Christians are horrified by this story of Uzzah. The story of Uzzah is not just about the holiness of God—even though it is that—but it also about His presence. In spite of the death of Uzzah, this story should teach us that the holiness and presence of God is **not** something to trample upon. The episode of Uzzah should imprint upon our minds that God is holy. When we reflect upon the holiness of God today, does this holiness make us stand in awe? Is God just someone "up in the sky"? Is He just "big daddy"? Or is God simply the "old man" above? Do we have the sense of "hallowed be your name" (Matthew 6:9) when we pray? In our encounter with God, do we reflect upon the Old Testament's concept of God's holiness and presence? What does "take off your sandals" convey to you? The worshipers of the Old Testament knew that "take off your sandals" (Exodus 3:5) spoke of the presence and holiness of God. Abraham's meeting with God called forth this cry: "I am nothing but dust and ashes" (Genesis 18:27). Do we ever feel this way? The story of Uzzah and the Ark of the Covenant is about his disrespect for God's presence and God's holiness.

Isaiah also understood something of God's holiness and presence when he saw the Lord seated on a throne: '"Woe to me!' I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of

[431]Second Samuel begins in 1010 BC and ends in approximately 970 BC.

[432]Kohath was one of the three sons of Levi (Numbers 3:17).

unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty'" (Isaiah 6:5). Even Peter begged Jesus, following his witness to a miracle, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" (Luke 5:8). Even the four living creatures, described in the Book of Revelation by John, exclaims, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come" (Revelation 4:8). Do we have this awe for the holiness of God? If so, then we too will seek to be holy even as He is holy. Peter writes: "But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy" (1 Peter 1:15).

Since we are servants of righteousness, we are to present ourselves holy to the Lord. It is in this regard that Paul admonishes the believers at Rome:

> Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual[a] act of worship. [2]Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:1-2)

Peter, as mentioned above, also calls for holiness in the life of the believers: "Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:13-16).

The author of the Book of Hebrews also calls attention to Jesus' action that resulted in a holy people: "The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp, and so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate **to make the people holy** through his own blood" (Hebrews 13:11-12). Since we are "the holy people" of God, this fact of holiness necessitates certain changes in our lives in order to coincide with our new nature: "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (13:15-16). Because we are redeemed through the blood of Christ, the author of Hebrews says,

> Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens,[a] Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. [15] For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. [16] Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (4:14-16)

CONCLUSION

When we reject the traditional slant (interpretation) attached to Uzzah's condemnation, we are not rejecting the importance of obedience in the life of the believer. To cite this incident to maintain our justification for separation from other Christians because of disagreements over doctrinal matters is manipulation of this text. To apply this story to a so-called worship service on Sunday morning with its five rituals performed in a prescribed way is to tear this story out of its context. This biblical data is distorted through the "spectacles" of our historical traditions. One reason for such distortion is that many Christians approach this text with their strong subjective biases. Many sincere believers see what they want to see through their "colored glasses" of long-cherished traditions. "Proof-texting" is a poor way to discover the meaning of a text. Cedric B. Johnson is on target when he writes with sharpness:

> There is a danger in viewing the Bible as an encyclopedia. An encyclopedia has many facts but most of them are unrelated. Some people seem to view the Bible as a series of unrelated verses. Such a totally atomistic approach to

[a] Or *reasonable*

[a] Or *gone into heaven*

> biblical interpretation would be rare, but a faulty or incomplete understanding of context is a common problem of interpreters.[433]

If God had authorized a traditional worship service with its five acts of worship as practiced among many Christians today, this Scripture is still the wrong Scripture to cite to condemn others over their so-called misunderstanding of certain traditions advanced by certain fellowships. If God had specified only vocal music and excluded instrumental accompaniment, then we would still need to cite another story other than the Uzzah story to illustrate the wrath of God against instrumental music, individual communion cups, Sunday school, and so on. Uzzah's story is about honoring God's presence or holiness. It is wrong to employ this Scripture in a way that the Holy Spirit did not intend. Since God has not designated one way or the other concerning praise to Him in the public gathering of God's people, then no Scripture is violated if we choose to sing and play an instrument in the assembly.

Again, if God had specified grape juice only in the communion, then the use of wine in the observance of the Lord's Supper would dishonor the command of God. Whether we use grape juice or wine, we violate no so-called principle of worship for the corporate worship of God's people. The same is true with the distribution of the bread in the Lord's Supper. Some fellowships among the one cup and non-Sunday school movement have divided over the breaking of the bread. Once more, if God had demanded that the bread in the communion be *pinched* and not *broken* into pieces, it would still be wrong to cite the Uzzah story to condemn those whose practices in the corporate worship do not coincide with their particular brand of orthodoxy.

Unfortunately the traditions of the church have made it difficult, if not almost impossible, to read the Bible without spectacles. In my preaching and teaching (fifty-eight years), I have discovered that the "faith of the fathers" has made it difficult for many Christians to approach the Scriptures with fresh eyes. The story of Uzzah and the Ark of God is about indifference for God's presence and His holiness. Hopefully, as a result of reading this story, Christians will grasp something of the holiness of God in their own relationship to the Creator of the universe and Savior of humanity. If the angels of God stood in awe, then should not we also stand in awe? Are we conscious of God's holiness? Is "holy, holy, holy" in our vocabulary? Do we honor God in our daily walk? Do we take the name of God in vain through our day-to-day conduct? Is God pleased with our reaction to His holiness? What does the story of Uzzah and the Ark of God convey to you? Again, we need to approach old texts through new eyes.

The next chapter (16) examines another Scripture in the arsenals of those who search for Scriptures that, on the surface, seem to uphold the necessity of every believer speaking the same thing, which ultimately means their brand of Christianity. First Corinthians 1:10 is examined in light of its context to demonstrate that the long-held traditions concerning the so-called unity-in- conformity mentality are not workable. The traditional interpretation by many believers within the Churches of Christ contradicts the overall teachings within the book itself.

[433]Cedric B. Johnson, *The Psychology of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 27.

16

Speak the Same Thing

> I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. (1 Corinthians 1:10)

Since this Scripture (1 Corinthians 1:10) is appealed to by almost every splinter group within the Churches of Christ to uphold its separation from other believers, it is necessary to analyze this quotation in order to understand what Paul sought to communicate to the Christians at Corinth. The objective in this chapter is not to condemn men and women who espouse an incorrect interpretation, but rather, the purpose of this in-depth study is to help individuals to understand the intent behind the words of Paul in order to bring about unity for which Jesus Christ prayed (John 17).

The words of Paul to the Corinthians are manipulated, not intentionally, by many Christians to justify their separation from other believers. This citation is employed by many well-meaning Christians to require conformity to a particular separation within the various Christian communities. The battle cry among many saints is: "agree with us or face excommunication." The more familiar quotation of this text is from the King James Version: "speak the same thing." With the voice of confidence, this Scripture is called forth to try to get everyone back into line with the status quo of a particular, or exacting, group.

But what does this well-known phrase mean? Does Paul set forth the suggestion that we must understand, or figure out, every passage of Scripture without distinction or differences? Is Paul advancing the notion that there can never be disagreements over doctrinal matters? Each division within God's people cites this verse to substantiate its conflict-ridden spirit. The current interpretation among many believers is an exhibition of exegetical dogmatism. In order to set the stage for a more accurate reading of Paul's now famous citation, it is necessary to give illustrations of how many equally God-fearing individuals who rely upon the same passage to validate their severance from others who do not kowtow to smuggled interpretations into the text, which, in my judgment, on the part of the interpreter, is without consciously thinking about the context,

EXAMPLES OF MISHANDLING AND CORRECT HANDLING

Old Paths Advocate

On December 1, 1932, Homer L. King (1892-1983), editor of the Old Paths Advocate (one-cup and non-Sunday school fellowship) cited 1 Corinthian 1:10 as justification for his position on rejection of other Christians who refuse to acquiesce to his "strange" interpretations of the Scriptures.[434] In this article, King calls attention to things that he objects to, but which other Christians do participate in. For instance, he writes:

> Is it not a fact that we are pretty well agreed on the things taught in the New Testament, but divided over the things not taught therein? Where in the New Testament do we read about Bible colleges, instrumental music in the worship, the

[434]See Homer L. King, "CAN'T WE AGREE ON SOMETHING," *Old Paths Advocate* LV, no. 10 (November 1, 1983): 1, 6.

> Sunday school with its human literature, classes, the modern pastorate, the multiplied societies to do the work of the church, and a plurality of drinking cups for each congregation? Are not these the major things over which we are divided? Did the church in the first century have these things? Was there ever a period of time in the history of the church that greater progress was made?[435]

According to King, in order for unity to exist among the people of God, we must conform to his comprehension of the Scriptures. If we disagree with his interpretation, we are not adhering to Paul's admonition:

> Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you; but *that* ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. (1 Corinthians 1:10)[436]

Today, seventy-six years later, this one-cup and non-Sunday school movement is still divided into many warring factions,[437] which is also true within the Churches of Christ as a whole. This particular group is divided into the bread-breakers and bread-pinchers, wine only versus the grape juice only, baptisteries versus non-baptisteries in the church building, the passing of the collection basket versus going to the communion table to "lay" by one's gift, the "order of worship" versus no required sequence for the so-called acts of worship (Acts 2:42), non-celebration of Christmas versus the Christmas' celebrators, divorce and remarriage versus the no-divorce for any reason, and so on. Why so much division?

Each fellowship of this one-cup movement cites this Scripture to others in order to bring about unity. But how is unity achieved according to this movement? It is not on the identity of who Jesus is, but rather upon agreement of their doctrinal understanding. This Scripture is applied by the Churches of Christ in general to anyone who dares to be different from their cherished beliefs. The motto of each distinctive fellowship within many churches is: "speak the same thing," but what does it mean to "speak the same thing"? Well, according to many devout believers, it simply means this: agree with my brand of Christianity or face expulsion from my group. Many, not all, believers within the OPA group are notorious for their factious spirit. It is my way, or no way at all. Remember, the Scripture says, "speak the same thing."

This Scripture is the battle cry for unity in conformity. As a result of this same mindset, King's son, Don King, now editor of the OPA, writes: "Listen, brethren: we believe it is wrong to use more than one cup. We believe people are going to be lost for using more than one cup."[438] Again, Kevin W. Presley, also associated with OPA fellowship, lambastes the position on "fellowship in diversity" as being in violation of 1 Corinthians 1:10:

> They say that since we can't agree upon the doctrines of our Lord, then they are irrelevant to our fellowship. . . . Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:10, "Now I beseech you, brethren by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that ye all SPEAK the same thing, and that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."[439]

The Restorer

We cannot limit this stretching of the text to just the one-cup believers, but this straightforward reading, without consideration of the context, is widespread among other sincere groups. One such writer from another camp is David L. Miller. In *The Restorer*, as guest editorial writer, he bemoans the fact that many advance the notion that the only kind of unity that is possible among believers is "unity in diversity." He says, "Such an

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[435] Ibid., 6.

[436] *The King James Version*, (Cambridge: Cambridge) 1769.

[437] For a brief history of this movement, see Dallas Burdette, "A Brief History of the One-cup and Non-Sunday School Movement" in Dallas Burdette, *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2008), 27-54.

[438] Don L. King, "Editorial: Proper Perspective," *Old Paths Advocate* LXVII, no. 9 (September 1995): 2.

[439] Kevin W. Presley, "NEO-DENOMINATIONALISM IN THE CHURCH OF CHRIST," *Old Paths Advocate* LXVII, no. 9 (September 1995): 1.

attitude overlooks important biblical principles."[440] One of the biblical principles he cites is 1 Corinthians 1:10. He correctly states, "Contentions sidetrack individuals from focusing upon Christ and His Word (1 Cor. 1:10-18)."

Miller is on target in his statement about "contentions sidetrack individuals," but, Miller, on the other hand, advances the notion in his essay that in order for unity to exist, then Christians must agree on doctrinal matters. Again, he writes: "the superficial, blind grasping for unity-at-all-cost mentality fails to recognize that division will always exist! According to the Bible, there will never be the kind of unity which some are compromising to achieve."[441] This statement about unity is an overstatement concerning "unity-at-all-cost." Ultimately, Miller believes that in order for us to be in conformity to 1 Corinthians 1:10, we must accept his understanding of the Scripture in order not to be sidetracked. This philosophy is rather naive. The *Old Paths Advocate* writers, too, will not fellowship *The Restorer* writers. *The Restorer* writers will not fellowship the *Old Paths Advocate* writers. How do they justify rejection of each other? Yes, 1 Corinthians 1:10 is utilized to bolster their position of departure.

J. Cleo Scott, another writer for *The Restorer,* writes an article on who can be fellowshipped. He, too, cites 1 Corinthians 1:10 to encourage an interpretation that he has, as well as many others, latched on to this favorite passage to maintain his traditions. He utilizes this Scripture against Christians who advocate the use of instruments in praise to God. It is in this regard that he pens:

> If one attempts to worship God by singing with an instrument invented by man, he is NOT walking in the light, nor walking by faith. Therefore, the child of God cannot walk with (have fellowship with) one who does. The same is true of many other religious innovations such as wearing robes, lighting candles, eating the Lord's Supper on Thursday, etc. When my brother joins himself to a religious group that does not walk in the light, then I cannot have fellowship with that brother. He is an erring brother and must be withdrawn from.[442]

He seeks justification for his actions toward those who cannot accept his twisting of the Scriptures. He cites 1 Corinthians 1:10 to give substance, so he thinks, to his allegations about who is or who is not walking in the light. If you agree with Scott, then you are walking in the light. If you disagree with Scott, then you are walking in darkness. Scott has been shaped by his traditions, not by the Word of God. The Churches of Christ, as a whole, need to do some rethinking in this area. The methods employed in the field of hermeneutics by many Church of Christ editors and writers need a theological overhaul. Much of what they say cannot be justified by the context. My remarks are not designed to question the integrity of the writers referred to in this chapter, but rather, to call attention to the need of reexamination of old texts through new eyes.

The Spiritual Sword

This religious paper, like *The Restorer*, advances the same type scenario that Churches of Christ, as a whole, advance in order to maintain their so-called purity—"we are the only ones that are true to the Word of God." Goebel Music seeks to prove, at least to himself, that men can agree on his concept of pattern theology, that is to say, his understanding of the so-called five acts of worship to be performed on Sunday morning in a so-call worship service. He issues a challenge to those who espouse unity in diversity and demands that all agree on doctrinal matters. Music asserts: "Proving and accepting 'pattern' theology. Man can speak the same thing (1. Cor. 1:10)."[443]

Jerry Moffitt also relies upon his interpretation of 1 Corinthians 1:10 to advance his objections to unity in diversity, which the Scriptures advance in spite of his hostility. Moffitt deals with this Scripture in the same haphazard way he employs other Scriptures in his short article. We stand amazed at the carelessness that Moffitt exhibits in his handling so many texts of Scripture. Before we can understand a particular verse, we must seek

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[440] David L. Miller, "Division," *The Restorer* 6, no. 8 (August 1986): 2.
[441] Ibid.
[442] J. Cleo Scott, "Whom May I Fellowship," *The Restorer* 6, no. 10 (October 1986): 4.
[443] Goebel Music, "The Challenge of 'Unity in Diversity,'" *The Spiritual Sword* 12, no. 1 (October 1980): 20.

to be aware of the whole. It is common sense to realize that we must interpret a verse in a book in light of its whole. We must comprehend the entire work before we can identify with or interpret a particular narrative or individual text. Two men, within the Churches of Christ (Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett), became aware of the context of 1 Corinthians 1:10 and called attention to current abuse of this passage to clobber other believers.

Moffitt poses the following question: "Will not adherence to God's word promote unity rather than division and diversity?"[444] Yes, God's Word does promote unity among believers, but this same Word also allows for diversity within God's community. The subtlety of Moffitt is again seen in his statement: "The sheer truth is, God not only gave us a faith (Jude 3), he expects us to be able to maintain UNITY when we receive that faith (Jn. 17:21; I Cor. 1:10; Phil. 3:16)."[445] The assumption on the part of Moffitt is that the "faith" that Jude speaks of is the interpretation that Moffitt attaches to the Scriptures. Remember each faction—over twenty-five divisions—claims Jude 3 as its own property.

Again, he says, "Love will cause us to walk in the light (I John 1:7), hold the pattern of sound words (II Tim. 1:13), and all speak the same things (I Cor. 1:10)."[446] Once more, he assumes that "to walk in the light" is to interpret the Scriptures according to his own interpretative community. He also identifies "sound words" as conformity to his brand of orthodoxy. Finally, he surmises that all believers can and will interpret the Scriptures the same, but, in all of his explanations, he never once analyzes the context. He just assumes that the authors (Paul and John) are agreeing with his understanding of Scripture.

As we seek to understand 1 Corinthians 1:10, we must consider the point of view of the author, that is to say, the meaning of the person behind the writing. A second factor in correct interpretation is that we must examine the intended reader, that is, the readers whom the author had in mind; and, as a final point, the ideal reader, that is to say, the reader who has sufficient information to interpret the writings correctly. Since the author spoke for God, then the writer's point of view and God's point of view are the same. It is obvious that the authors of the New Testament books, as well as the Old Testament books, assume that the readers will read the whole of their works in order to understand the particulars. Before we can embark upon the meaning of a particular verse, we must consider the overall meaning of the book. Even though I respect the above writers, nevertheless, we must dissent emphatically from their teachings on 1 Corinthians 1:10. Our ignorance of the context can lend an air of plausibility to our interpretation.

Mission Messenger

In 1965, Carl Ketcherside (1908-1989), editor and author, wrote an article that exploded like wild fire within the denominational Churches of Christ. He attacked the traditional interpretation of 1 Corinthians 1:10. He himself had earlier used this Scripture to hack to death anyone who disagreed with his understanding of God's Word. When Ketcherside went back to the context of this often-cited verse, he discovered that this Scripture was written to bring about unity, not division. Ketcherside states the matter firmly:

> Since every faction in the Christian spectrum, exists on the basis of a special emphasis, either upon a particular scripture or a specific idea, what is the basis for the cult of conformity and order of orthodoxy with the restoration movement of which we are heirs? I think it can be said without fear of denial that the basis of operation centers around 1 Corinthians 1:10. It is a twisting, warping and wresting of this scripture which leads them astray. It is astonishing that a passage written to offset division should be given an interpretation which will open and aggravate numerous festering wounds without ever closing a single one.[447]

This article is an in-depth discussion of the context of Paul's statement to the Corinthians. He correctly calls attention to the fact that the statement (speak the same thing) has nothing to do with conformity of opinion

[444]Jerry Moffitt, "IS UNITY-IN-DIVERSITY POSSIBLE?", *The Spiritual Sword* 15, no. 1 (October 1983): 18.
[445]Ibid.
[446]Ibid., 19.
[447]Carl Ketcherside, "Conformity or Diversity," *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 7 (July 1965): 101.

or interpretation.[448] This letter allows for differences within the body. Paul's letter to Corinth was designed to heal a gap that existed within the fellowship. He did not advance the notion that unity of opinion was prerequisite to unity or acceptance of one another. Just a casual glance at Chapter 8 in 1 Corinthians reveals that Paul refutes the general interpretation placed upon 1 Corinthians 1:10. There is room for differences within the body of Christ, but there is no room for division.

Restoration Review

In 1976, Leroy Garrett (1918-2015), editor and author, also addressed 1 Corinthian 1:10. He begins his analysis by asking several questions: "Does this passage enjoin believers to see everything in the Bible alike? Does it teach that we must see eye to eye on all points of doctrine, that there can be no honest differences of opinion?"[449] In this article, Garrett reveals the many issues over which sincere Christians are divided. After a brief listing of the many divisions within the Churches of Christ, he concludes that "1 Cor. 1:10 is made to apply only to those items that are peculiar to a particular segment."[450]

Many Christians are reluctant to reject ancient traditions, even when new evidence demonstrates that the old interpretation is not tenable. It is not uncommon for believers to jump to unfounded conclusions without looking at the context. Once more, Garrett puts it graphically: "The truth is that 1 Cor. 1:10, as abused in this manner, never has been, is not now, nor will it ever be consistently practiced by any believer. The reason is simple: it is impossible."[451] Just a casual glance at 1 Corinthian reveals that sameness of viewpoint is not in Paul's mind (1 Corinthians 8). In this letter, Paul never calls for conformity, but rather, he calls for love (1 Corinthians 13). The only kind of unity that Paul addresses in the church at Corinth is unity in diversity.

The first part of the chapter has sought to call attention to various authors who advance the negative as well as the positive aspects of Paul's now famous words. His statement, "speak the same thing," is employed by the various fragmented divisions within the Christian community, especially those Christians associated within the Churches of Christ in order to justify separation from other believers who refuse to subscribe to the particular beliefs of certain groups. The question that still confronts the reader is, what does the phrase really mean? The interpretation set forth by many believers is a notable exhibition of exegetical dogmatism.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

As we seek to understand this misunderstood phrase, we must seek to comprehend Paul's saying by consulting the context. It is in this vein that Milton S. Terry (1840-1914), American Methodist minister and educator, captures the heart of the context in the interpretation of any text. He writes:

> It often happens, also, that a writer uses a common word in some special and peculiar sense, and then his own definitions must be taken, or the context and scope must be consulted, in order to determine the precise meaning intended.[452]

"Context and scope" are principles that must be interpreted by Scripture. We must not use Scripture to nullify other Scriptures. As noted above, this verse (1 Corinthians 1:10) has been variously understood, and the most accomplished preachers and teachers have differed widely in their explanations. Since this confusion is prevalent among many of God's people, all dogmatism of tone should be excluded, and we, as God's people, should endeavor to place ourselves into the very heart and situation of those to whom this Epistle was first written. We should study with minute attention Paul's language as well as the overall thrust of this Epistle in order to understand the emphasis of 1:10.

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[448]Ibid., 102.
[449]Leroy Garrett, "That You All Speak the Same Thing," *Restoration Review* 15, no. 5 (May 1976): 282.
[450]Ibid., 283.
[451]Ibid.
[452]Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, nd. on original, republished 1974), 181.

Since such wide differences of opinions prevail, we cannot allow any deductive assumptions of what ought or ought not to be found. All such presuppositions are ruinous to sound interpretation. Paul should be permitted to explain himself. Thus, we should not be so full of ideas drawn from our own traditions as to desire to find what is not in the text.

Just a perusal of the Book of First Corinthians reveals that Paul had acquired a great deal of information from the various sources pertaining to the existing turmoil within the local body of believers at Corinth. Paul discloses some of this information: "My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you" (1 Corinthians 1:11). Paul closes his correspondence by naming three individuals: "I was glad when Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus arrived, because they have supplied what was lacking from you. [18] For they refreshed my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition" (16:17-18).

The divisions that existed in this local body of believers were multifaceted, or many-sided. There were schisms over personalities (1:10-4:21), problems concerning immaturity (3:1-4), moral irregularities (Chapters 5-6), Christians going before pagan courts with other Christians (6:1-8), dealing with food sacrificed to idols (Chapter 8), superior knowledge (8:1-2), improper behavior during the Lord's Supper (11:17-24), and an unhealthy emphasis upon spiritual gifts (Chapters 12-14).

In this list of ruptures, we observe the elevation of certain leaders over other leaders (1:12-13). The Corinthians failed to recognize that all members were of the same body (12:12-13). These carnal Christians had formed factions. Paul appealed to unity in the name of Jesus. Listen to Paul as he issues his appeal to these believers: "I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought" (1:10).

Paul reveals that some had sided with various distinguished persons (1:12-13) rather than recognizing all as members of the same body (12:12-13). As a result of not having a proper understanding of Christianity, they formed factions. He appealed for agreement in "the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:10). Listen to Paul as he goes right to the jugular vein of carnality:

> You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? [4] For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere men? [5] What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. (3:3-5)

The discord had to do with petty jealousies, which jealousies disrupted the Spirit's unity (Ephesians 4:1-7). Some would say, "I follow Paul" another would declare, "I follow Apollos"; another would verbalize, "I follow Cephas"; still another would utter, "I follow Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:12). Paul stressed that their "unitedness" was in Christ. They were to make the same effort toward maintaining the "unity of the Spirit" in the same way that the Ephesians were also to preserve the Spirit's unity. In the first six chapters of First Corinthians, Paul exposes the human-exalting schisms that fractured the harmony for which Jesus prayed (John 17). J. Sidlow Baxter (1903-1999), pastor and theologian, portrays the essence of the problem that originated Paul's plea for the Corinthians to "agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought" (1 Corinthians 1:10). Listen to Baxter as he writes with insight:

> The Pauline loyalist doubtless championed Gospel freedom and would claim primacy for Paul as the founder of their church. The Apollos clique were the intellectuals, carried away by the eloquence and seeming superiority of the brilliant Alexanderine expositor who had made such a flash among them since Paul's first visit. The Cephas block were presumably the Judaistically inclined, whose boast would be in Peter as the authoritative voice of the apostles and the mother church at Jerusalem. There was even a "Christ" party invidiously arrogating the Name, and saying, "I am of Christ" in a factious way which implied the inferiority of all others. Thus were the names of the Lord's servants and of the Lord Himself disputatiously played off against each other until the silly but serious rivalries threatened a fatal disruption of the church.[453]

[453]J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Bible: A Survey and Study of Each Book from Genesis to Revelation* [Six volumes Complete in One Volume], (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960, 1966), vol. 6, 95.

Paul did not preach one Christ and Peter another and Apollos another. There is but one Christ and one Savior and one Gospel (Galatians 1:6-9). The Christians at Corinth were looking at the Gospel from a philosophical point of view. They got their eyes off our Lord Jesus Christ and on the servants of our Master. This detour led to controversy. In Chapter 3 of First Corinthians, Paul accents that there must not be strife among God's sons and daughters.

What does it really mean to "agree" or "speak the same thing" (KJV)? Three words stand out in 1 Corinthians 1:10: (**1**) agree, (**2**) division, and (**3**) united. The KJV renders the Greek text as "speak the same thing." But what does this really mean? Whatever this Scripture is saying, it cannot contradict other clear passages of God's written Revelation. In other words, he is not saying that every Christians must see eye-to-eye on every verse in the sacred Writings. In Chapter 8 of First Corinthians, Paul did not expect all Christians to unite in any one verbal statement concerning their understanding of Scripture. Pay attention to Paul as he encourages unity in spite of differences of understanding:

> Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge.[a] Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. [2] **The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know**. [3] But the man who loves God is known by God. (8:1-3)

First Corinthians 13 sums up the very essence of what Paul addressed in 8:1-3. Again, listen to Paul as he writes:

> Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. **Now I know in part**; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. [13] And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. (13:12-13)

Their relationship to God was founded upon mutual sonship, not upon agreement upon all doctrinal interpretations. If we would read the entire Book of First Corinthians in one sitting, we would be able to see the whole picture of Christian unity. The traditional explanation of 1:10 does not harmonize with the totality of God's Word. Just a casual reading of Chapters 14-15 of the Book of Romans refutes this much abused passage. David Prior takes into custody the very core of Paul's admonition when he pens the following informative remarks:

> The appeal constrains three words with a political flavour—agree, dissension and be united. The first word means, literally, 'say the same thing' and is found on the first-century gravestone of a married couple, indicating, not the 'yes-man' mentality, but working together in a harmonious relationship.[454]

What is this "oneness" all about? What does it really mean to be "perfectly united in mind and thought"? Context is the great solver of this question. There are three kinds of context: (1) *immediate*, (2) *remote*, and (3) *larger*. One context speaks of the verses preceding and following. The second context speaks of the book itself, and the third context speaks of the Bible as a whole that addresses the same subject or issues. For the *larger* context, we should examine Luke's statement in the Book of Acts concerning the behavior of the believers toward one another. Luke writes: "All the believers **were one in heart and mind**. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had" (Acts 4:32). These believers did not claim his or her possession as one's own, but rather they shared with one another. "One in heart and mind" is the essence of what Paul stressed when he put pen to paper: "agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought" (1 Corinthians 1:10). Believers were to live in "a harmonious relationship" with one another—not party schisms, or cliques or factions.

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[a] Or "We all possess knowledge," *as you say*

[454]David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthian: Life in the Local Church*,, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1985), 35.

As we study Paul's plea, we cannot help but reflect upon his second letter to Corinth when he petitions once more for unity: "Finally, brothers, good-by. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you" (2 Corinthians 13:11). In spite of the theological irregularities or idiosyncrasies, they were still one body. It is in this same vein that Paul appeals to the Philippians to imitate the humility of Christ. Again, Paul goes right to the core of "be of one mind, live in peace":

> If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, [2] then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. [3] Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. [4] Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. [5] Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 2:1-5)

The Philippians were encouraged to "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ" (1:27). Jesus rebukes His disciples for jealousies running rampant among themselves. After setting them straight on what His mission is all about, He says, "Have salt in your selves, and be at peace with each other" (Mark 9:50). We would do well to read this entire chapter. Jesus confronts His disciples about their arrogant attitudes toward one another and about causing one to sin. Jesus stressed unity, brotherhood, and love—not contention. Conflict is resolved among God's people and peace restored when we recognize in one another a common responsibility to Jesus and the Gospel of the Kingdom.

An excellent commentary on 1 Corinthians 1:10 is found in 1 Samuel 18:1: "After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan **became one in spirit** with David, and he loved him as himself." The Corinthians were to be one in spirit because they were all baptized into one body by the one Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13). Earlier, Paul calls attention to the truth that Christians do not have to be in perfect harmony in their understanding or explanation of the Scriptures to be one in Christ (see Chapter 13 of First Corinthians). Paul, too, struggled for the Christians in Colossae:

> My purpose is that they may **be encouraged in heart and united in love**, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, [3] in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. [4] I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. [5] For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is. (Colossians 2:2-5)

The author of the Book of Second Chronicles also encapsulates the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:10, when he pens the following pregnant words: "Also in Judah the hand of God was on the people to give them unity of mind to carry out what the king and his officials had ordered, following the word of the LORD" (2 Chronicles 30:12). James, our Lord's brother, too, sums up the very essence of Paul's plea to the Corinthians when he pours out his heart for unity:

> But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. [18] Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness. (James 3:17-18)

CONCLUSION

We should always hesitate before superimposing upon 1 Corinthians 1:10 our own speculative and subjective interpretation. If a biblical text is torn out of its biblical context, the text can be heard to say things not in the text. Our interpretation ought to be checked by reference to the whole of the context. This chapter ("Speak the Same Thing") has no desire to attack those who follow a path without context. I am conscious that many expositors are no doubt good and godly men and women; but still, there are interpretations that may not, for all their sincerity, ring true to the biblical Revelation itself. The position of this study is **not** to condemn but to seek to lead Christians into a clearer understanding of God's Word. According to some, as noted above, their collective judgments, or interpretations, establish their views of God's truth into an unchangeable monument. In

other words, their decisions are free from error and become the unalterable law of the Medes and Persians. Once more, we should reread this Scripture through new eyes.

Chapter 17 (Unfruitful Works of Darkness) examines another Scripture (Ephesians 5:11) that is frequently taken out of context to uphold justification for separation from other believers who do not espouse the same doctrinal interpretation of the Scriptures as they themselves do in their own unique fellowship.

17

Unfruitful Works of Darkness

Paul, as he brings his Epistle to the Ephesians to a close, encourages the believers to "Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather to expose them" (Ephesians 5:11). Unfortunately, many Christians wrench this Scripture from its context and assign their own particular slant upon Paul's warning. The "unfruitful works of darkness" is often identified by the various oddities that certain fellowships adopt in their liturgy, that is to say, their liturgical worship service. For the first seventeen years of my preaching and teaching ministry, I cited this verse to condemn those who employed individual communion cups in the distribution of the Lord's Supper, participation in Bible study classes, instrumental music, and so on. Regrettably, I never read the context in order to determine what the intent of the author was.

Today, Ephesians 5:11 is still employed by many sincere believers to justify their castigation of other Christians who do not subscribe to their particular concept of a so-called worship service, which service consists of the performance of five ritualistic acts that have to be carried out in a precise manner in order for worship to be in Spirit and in truth. This passage is cited by many well-meaning Christians to justify their separation from other Christians who refuse to be traditional to the whims of a select few who hold to certain doctrines that are considered essential to salvation. The KJV employs the expression "unfruitful works of darkness" and exhorts the saints to have "nothing to do with" those who participate in these deeds of darkness.

If we wish to interpret Paul's phrase correctly, we need to begin reading with 4:17-19, which calls attention to our lifestyle. Listen to Paul as he writes:

> So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. [18] They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. [19]Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

Paul continues to press home the concept that there must be a change in our external behavior. Immoral behavior is totally unacceptable for us who have accepted Christ as Lord in our lives. Again, we should pay attention to Paul as he zeros in on the person who has tasted the good Word of God:

> You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; [23] to be made new in the attitude of your minds; [24]and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (4:22-24)

Since we are new creations in Christ, this rebirth demands that we put off the old corrupted nature with its deceitful desires. We must now seek righteousness and holiness in our daily walk with God. Once more, Paul argues with forcefulness as he draws a distinction between the conduct of the pagans versus the actions of believers:

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.
[26] "In your anger do not sin"[a]: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, [27] and do not give the devil a foothold.
[28] He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. [29]Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. [30] And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. [31]Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. [32] Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (4:25-32)

These eight verses draw a distinction between behavior that honors God and behavior that does not honor God. We are to "put off falsehood," which is one of the "unfruitful deeds of darkness." Again, Paul cuts away all underbrush as he focuses on "unwholesome talk," which, too, comes under the umbrella of "unfruitful deeds of darkness." Yet again, he identifies the "unfruitful deeds of darkness" that we are to "have nothing to do with." Listen to Paul as he catalogues characteristics that should not be found among God's people: "bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander, and malice" (4:31). Over again, he warns the Ephesians:

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. [4] Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. [5] For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.[b] (5:3-5)

We cannot read this list without a consciousness of Paul's definition of what he means by the "unfruitful deeds of darkness." Throughout this section, Paul draws a contrast between the "unfruitful deeds of darkness" and the fruitful deeds of righteousness that exalt God. We are "created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (4:24). We are to "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (4:32). Again, he describes the fruitful deeds of light this way: "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children [2] and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (5:1-2). Following this strong statement about the believer's ethical conduct, he draws a contrast between two worlds:

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light [9] (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) [10]and find out what pleases the Lord. [11] Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. [12]For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret.
[13]But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, [14] for it is light that makes everything visible. (5:8-14)

As we approach any text, we must always be conscious of *ex post facto*, or after the fact, decisions that rule the way we interpret a text. *Ex post facto* (after the fact) methodology of interpretation explains why some interpret a passage in one way and not in another. For us to interpret this text (Ephesians 5:11) as dealing with "pattern theology," which deals with the way a worship service is conducted, we bring our religious training to the text and interpret this saying in light of our traditions. Many within the various segments within the Churches of Christ approach this text with strong subjective biases. In other words, they view this Scripture through colored glasses.

If we are to interpret the Word of God correctly, we must not approach the text as a series of unrelated sayings. Since many Christians move toward God's Word as unrelated verses, we witness a faulty or incomplete understanding of context. The atomistic methodology to biblical interpretation results in "proof-texting" as the means of establishing our beliefs. We must be conscious of bringing our own prior frame of reference from outside sources as we advance toward an understanding of the Bible.

On the surface, this Scripture, in isolation from its context, appears to give validity to the actions of certain individuals. Yet the traditional interpretation among many Christians within the Christian community is simply the subjective world of the interpreter. Almost every division within the known twenty-five or more

[a] Psalm 4:4
[b] Or *kingdom of the Christ and God*

distinctive religious bodies within the Stone/Campbell Movement cite this passage in order to give some soundness to their transactions of chastisement (withdrawal) from anyone who dares to disagree with the status quo of that particular religious fellowship.

The "unfruitful works of darkness," depending on which fellowship we are associated with, generally are associated with instrumental accompaniment in singing, solos, quartet singing, handclapping in the assembly, hand raising in the assembly, Sunday school, individual cups, manner of breaking the bread in the Lord's Supper, the church treasury, Bible colleges, and so on. In other words, if someone violates what one considers to be one of the so-called five acts (rituals) of worship on Sunday morning, then one must not have "fellowship with" that individual.

When we begin with a faulty perception of the context, we find our own expectations. What an author meant is the only true interpretation to any Scripture. In other words, the meaning of a text is the author's meaning. We must reject the traditional interpretation, not because it is private, but rather because it is wrong. If we fail to consider context, this failure leads to an interpretation of its own, which is totally cut off from its author.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I desire to give a brief overview of the Book of Ephesians. Needless to say, there is a certain amount of repetition in these final remarks. In the first three chapters of Ephesians, Paul develops the "one faith" that is mentioned in 4:5. In Chapter 2, he calls attention to their prior state of utter degradation (2:1-3). These individuals had followed the "ways of the world" (2:3). In Chapter 4, he exhorts the Ephesians to "live a life worthy of the calling you received" (4:1). They were taught "to put off your old self" and "to be made new in the attitude of your minds" (4:22, 23). Since we are created "to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (4:25), we should cast off "bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice" (4:31). In this same chapter, he warns us about "unwholesome talk" (4:29). Once more, he calls attention to "sexual immorality" (5:3). Paul stresses the point that there should not even be "a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people" (5:3).

Yet, it appears that some thought that purity of life really did not matter (5:6). "Let no man deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them" (5:6-7). Earlier, he says, "For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God" (5:5). Having given these instructions about right behavior, he then says:

> For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light [9] (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) [10]and find out what pleases the Lord. [11]Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. [12]For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. (5:8-12)

The "fruitless deeds of darkness" is the same as the "unfruitful works of darkness" (KJV). We are to have no participation ("fellowship") in these acts of darkness, "but rather expose them" (5:11).

I pray that God will help each of us to not use the Bible to prove a biased perspective. We must make sure that we do not read the biblical messages with a predetermined interpretive grid. One of the best ways to make sure that the Scriptures support our position is to ignore the context. Many Christians, unconsciously, lock themselves into what has been passed on from generation to generation. Our presuppositions are too often read into the Word of God rather than being read out of the Word of God. We need to relook at Ephesians 5:11 through new eyes.

The next chapter (18) explores another "pet" Scripture (Ephesians 4:5), which text concerns Paul's use of the phrase "one faith." In order to interpret this saying correctly, we must consult the context in making our decision as to what Paul meant by this expression. It is not uncommon for sincere believers to apply this turn of phrase to identify their particular brand of Christianity. Yet, the context does not lend support to this

interpretation. Chapter 18 explores the "one faith" in light of its context, which includes the **immediate** (verses preceding and following) context, the ***remote*** (the book itself) context, and the ***larger*** (other New Testament books) context. In the final analysis, we discover that the "one faith" is about the mystery of God, namely Christ.

18

One Faith

The "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5 is utilized by many well-meaning Christians to promote divisions within the body of Christ. Today, there are over twenty-five ruptures within the Stone/Campbell movement that lay claim to this passage as their own unique property. The "one faith" is **not** generally associated with Jesus as the object of faith, that is to say, God's way of salvation by grace through faith, but rather the "one faith" is usually linked with doctrinal creeds set forth by individual splinter groups. If one endorses instrumental music, then, according to the opposition, one is not adhering to the "one faith." In other words, for some believers, the "one faith" is acappella singing, not instrumental accompaniment. For one to sing with instrumental accompaniment during a so-called worship service is tantamount to treason against God.

This is just one of the numerous problems that carves up the Churches of Christ into various warring factions. For instance, there are some groups within the Churches of Christ that raise objections to the employment of individual communion cups and Sunday school.[455] According to this out-of-the-ordinary fellowship of believers, the users of individual communion cups and Sunday school are interrupting the "one faith" in Ephesians. This catalog of creedal statements for faithfulness is almost never-ending. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze Paul's "one faith" in light of its context in order to promote the unity for which Paul pleads. Having said this, this essay will also explore other books written by Paul, Luke, and Peter in order to lend a helping hand in comprehending more fully the meaning found in the Ephesian passage. This in-depth study will explore Ephesians 4:5 in light of its full context—the Book of Ephesians as a book. Douglas J. Moo (b. 1950), professor of New Testament at Wheaton College, sums up perfectly the need to read a book as a book, not Scriptures in isolation from their intended meaning:

> One of the biggest mistakes we can make in reading the Bible is to read paragraphs in isolation from one another. Certain devotional books, by selecting daily readings from all over the Bible, unfortunately encourage this practice. But the biblical authors meant their books to be read as books. Reading a paragraph chosen at random from the middle of, say, 2 Kings is something like reading a paragraph in isolation from the middle of the latest John Grisham novel. To be sure, the various biblical genres are not really comparable to a modern novel, and some of the genres require far less sequential reading than others (e.g., the Psalms). But the point is still valid. We can get the full meaning from any text of Scripture only as we appreciate the way the author intended it to function in the context of his whole book.[456]

One goal of this investigation of this misunderstood Scripture is to read Ephesians as a whole in order to determine how the word *faith* is employed. This chapter will seek to set forth the word *faith* in its context, that is, the entire book, not some isolated passage cited to give credence to our brand of orthodoxy. This subject about "faith" is of such vital importance for the preservation of the unity for which Paul advocates in his letter to the Christian community in Ephesus that it is necessary to develop this theme of "one faith" in order to assist individuals in keeping the "unity of the Spirit" (4:3).

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[455]In spite of these beliefs, this fellowship is composed of individuals who wish to be true to the Word of God. I personally know many men and women who are a part of this fellowship, and they are some of the godliest individuals that one can expect to meet.

[456]Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 271.

As we reflect upon Paul's seven "ones" for harmony among the Ephesians,[457] we quickly discover that number five ("one faith") is used by many Christians, as stated above, as a means of justification for disassociation from anyone who refuses to subscribe to their peculiar interpretation of Scriptures. This Scripture is wrenched from its context to justify separation from every individual who refuses to kowtow, or bow in deep respect, to the dictates of a particular factious group. Finally, this chapter will briefly investigate the Churches of Christ and their dilemma in lifting Ephesians 4:5 from the author's intended meaning.

EXEGESIS OR EISEGESIS?

We should step back and look at the Book of Ephesians as a whole in order to capture the intent of the author's use of the phrase "one faith." What is the focus of this expression? If we seek to make points that the biblical author did not aim to formulate, then we engage in eisegesis (reading into) rather than exegesis (drawing out from). In other words, when we engage in exegesis, we obtain the meaning of the passage by drawing the meaning from the context rather than reading into the text our own preconceived ideas, likes, dislikes, and so on.

We must learn to listen anew to the biblical text. We are so use to reading the Bible as many godly preachers and teachers have taught us that for us to deny traditions is tantamount to denying the Bible. As we approach Ephesians 4:5, we must learn to reevaluate and reinterpret what has been handed down to our particular group, or interpretative community. Because of tradition(s), we must seek to uncover the mind of the author through his own writings; otherwise, we can postulate various theories that are like a labyrinth[458] from which we can hardly find our way out of the tangle. This study seeks to remove a lot of the underbrush that has entangled so many of God's people.

GOD'S MESSAGE OF RECONCILIATION

The problem that hinders so many Christians is confusion over the word *faith* (πίστις pistis). The word *faith* can refer to that which is the channel through which the righteousness of God is imputed to men and women—subjective faith (inward faith—Romans 1:16-17), or the word *faith* can suggest the message of Good News proclaimed to the world—objective faith (the mystery—Ephesians 4:5). Also the word *faith* can indicate faithfulness on the part of individuals who put their trust in God's message of reconciliation. This chapter develops the thesis that the "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5 is the event of Jesus Christ Himself, also spoken of as "the mystery of His will" (1:9). In other words, the event is proclaimed as the Gospel, that is to say, the means whereby God saves the world. In my judgment, the "one faith" is not good news *about* the various creeds of Christendom, but rather it is Good News about salvation by faith in the finished work of Christ upon Calvary *for* men and women. The word *faith* can be used as a synonym for "the Gospel."[459]

MEANING OF ONE FAITH IN EPHESIANS 4:5

This study calls attention to the subjective (personal) element of faith as well as to two different interpretations of "faith" as objective, that is, (1) a message of salvation—Jesus as the object of private faith, and (**2**) a compendium of theology—a partisan creed. As we peruse the many great commentators, we quickly discover that the commentaries, as a whole, all seem to be in trouble concerning the exact meaning of Paul's expression—"one faith." There are basically three concepts, as mentioned above, advanced concerning the "one

[457]The seven ones are: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord one faith, one baptism, and one God (Ephesians 4:3-6)

[458]Labyrinth: something extremely complex or tortuous in structure.

[459]Robert B. Hayes, *The Letter to the Galatians*, in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol., XI (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 211.

faith" in Ephesians 4:5: (**1**) the quality of faith in the individual [subjective], (**2**) Jesus is the "one faith" [objective], and (**3**) a compendium of theology [objective].

One of the most popular interpretations of this expression is that faith is a "compendium of theology,"[460] especially within the Churches of Christ. For many Christians, this concept of a compendium of theology, through isolation from context, appears to have some validity, but, on a deeper reading of the context of 4:5, we discover problems with this presupposition. This understanding of faith as a compendium of theology is the culprit that has splintered the body of Christ into painful splinters.

OVERVIEW OF THE WORD FAITH AS EMPLOYED IN SOME NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS

Before analyzing the word *faith* in Ephesians 4:5, it would be helpful to briefly observe this word *faith* in other New Testament books in order to arrive at a correct interpretation of this misused word. Just a casual review of the word *faith* in the New Testament reveals a sense that is not commonly maintained by many Christians within the Churches of Christ. Even though we encounter "faith" as a subjective condition of salvation (the means whereby one appropriates salvation by grace), still, we must never forget that the object of subjective faith is Jesus Christ. The two are wedded together. Subjective faith and objective faith are so intertwined throughout Scripture that it is sometimes difficult to determine which is which. In Paul's first letter to Corinth, he speaks of their subjective faith: "so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power" (1 Corinthians 2:5). As a result of Paul's message and preaching, the Corinthians believed (subjective faith). Then he develops the substance of his message and preaching, which in essence is the "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5. Listen to Paul as he elaborates on the object of their faith:

> **We do**, however, **speak a message of wisdom** among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. [7]No, **we speak of God's secret wisdom**, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. [8]**None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory**. (1 Corinthians 2:6-8)

It is in this same vein that Peter, too, speaks of subjective and objective faith in his discourse on the Day of Pentecost. He emphasized subjective faith—faith in Jesus—as prerequisite to salvation. Yet, this subjective faith had Jesus as its object. This subjective faith had to do with justifying faith, that is to say, faith is the means whereby God imputes to man and woman His righteousness. Faith is the means whereby we appropriate the salvation offered to us by grace. Yes, Jesus is the object of subjective faith, a faith that results in eternal life. Once more, Peter tells the people: "And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Acts 2:21). We must exercise faith in the "one Lord." Once we have been put in a right relationship with God through personal faith in Jesus, then we seek to bring our lives into harmony with our new relationship with God through Jesus (Romans 6). It is in this same vein that Paul writes to the Philippians:

> Whatever happens**, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ**. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel. (Philippians 1:27)

[460]Each of the twenty-five or more divisions within the Churches of Christ sets forth its own "compendium of theology" that we must adhere to in order for us to be recognized as a faithful child of God. Each faction maintains that its understanding of Christian dogma is the "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5. This misunderstanding has opened the floodgates for division on every street corner.

FAITH" IN THE BOOK OF ACTS[461]

As we peruse any book of the New Testament, we must determine the meaning to be attached to the term *faith*. For example, how is the word *faith* employed in Philippians 1:27? In this verse, Paul speaks of "The faith of the gospel." The context reveals that "the faith of the gospel" is nothing other than the message of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus. The context is the deciding factor. This is also true as we turn our attention to the word *faith* in the Book of Acts. As we seek to understand subjective and objective faith, we must always look at the context. For instance, Luke gives insight into the subjective element of *faith* in his reporting of the selecting of the seven deacons to oversee the work of charity (Acts 6:1-6). In this section, Luke speaks of Stephen as "a man **full of faith** and of the Holy Spirit" (6:5). The word *faith* in this context appears to be subjective faith. On the other hand, Luke calls attention to "the faith" as objective in his recounting of how the Word of God spread: "So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became **obedient to the faith**" (6:7; see also Romans 1:5; 10:16; 16:26; 2 Thessalonians 1:8). In these verses, "obedience to the faith" means the acceptance of Jesus as the means of salvation.

In this section (Acts 6:1-6), we discern the word *faith* employed in two different senses. We must look at the context in order to arrive at the sense to be attached to the word *faith*. Since the object of subjective faith is belief in Jesus, we can surmise that a large number of priests accepted Jesus as the Anointed One of God, which is what it means to be "obedient to the faith." Sometimes the phrase "obedience to the faith" (ὑπήκουον τῇ πίστει Juphkouon th pistei "obeyed the faith" [Acts 6:7]) can also refer to one's ethical behavior.[462] Here again, we must always consult the context in trying to ascertain the correct meaning. Luke also records the words of Peter to the Sanhedrin concerning "the faith," even though the words *the faith* are not employed, nevertheless, the following response to the Sanhedrin by Peter reveals that this is the substance of his statement: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (4:12).

FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Island of Cyprus

The Book of Acts covers a period of approximately thirty years, beginning with Jerusalem and ending in Rome. Approximately eighteen years after Peter's message about salvation through Jesus, Paul and Barnabas and John Mark began their first missionary tour. Their first adventure was on the island of Cyprus (about AD 48). They landed at Salamis and proclaimed "**the word of God**" in the Jewish synagogues (13:5). After this proclamation about Jesus, both men went to Paphos (13:6) and were immediately summoned by Sergius Paulus, the proconsul, because "he wanted to **hear the word of God**" (13:7). What did he hear? He heard about "the

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[461]This section does not cover Paul's third missionary journey. I suggests that you read the entire Book of Acts for yourself and give special attention to all of the sermons reported by Luke. This reading should give you a feel for subjective faith and objective faith. One implies the other; one cannot, in its strictest sense, divorce one from the other. Even though one may lay emphasis on one without mentioning the other, still one must never forget that ultimately the two belong together.

[462]This phrase "obedience to the faith" is interpreted by various scholars as the "content of faith" (objective), but, on the other hand, some scholars assume that "obedience to the faith" is dealing with ethical behavior. We cannot deny that there must be obedience to the faith in that sense. But, the question is, is that the meaning attached to the phrase by Paul? See John Murray *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 13, for faith as an act of obedience, or commitment to the Gospel of Christ. On the other hand, Kasemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 15, takes the phrase to be equivalent to the message of salvation. He says,

> The obedience of faith means acceptance of the message of salvation (Bultmann, *Theology*, I, 89f.). The missionary situation has given both noun and verb their predominant meaning, and the characteristic linking of faith and obedience in Paul has a meaning which is not primarily ethical but, as is especially clear in 2 Cor. 10:4-6, eschatological: When the revelation of Christ is accepted, the rebellious world submits again to its Lord. This understanding of faith corresponds to the apostle's Kyrious Christology.

faith" through the proclamation of "the word of God." Immediately upon hearing this word, Luke informs his readers that Elymas, the sorcerer, "tried to turn the proconsul from the faith" (13:8). In verse 8, we immediately detect that "the faith" is employed objectively. Luke uses synonymous terms to describe the message of salvation. Whether we refer to the message of salvation as "the word of God" or "the faith," we are speaking of the same Christ event in this context.

Pisidian Antioch

On this same tour, the three set sail for Perga in Pamphylia, but John Mark returned to Jerusalem (13:13). Paul and Barnabas continued this missionary trip through Pisidian Antioch (13:14—275 miles NW of Paphos). During this period of evangelism, Paul preached "the faith." Luke informs his readers that Paul preached Jesus. In the course of his sermons, he said, "Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that **through Jesus** the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. [39] **Through him** everyone **who believes** is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses" (13:38-39).

Iconium

From there they went to Iconium (14:1, 71 miles SE of Antioch) and preached. Luke writes: "a great number of the **Jews and Gentiles believed**" (14:1). This is subjective faith on the part of the Jews and Gentiles. What did they believe? They believed the message about God's grace (14:3), which is also called the "good news" (14:7). In other words, they accepted Jesus as God's way of salvation. Jesus is always the object of our personal faith. In verse 3, this Gospel (the faith) is called "the word of his grace," but, in verse 7, this message is referred to as the "good news." Again, one observes the various phraseologies employed by Luke to express the same thing.

Lystra

After leaving Iconium, they left for Lystra (14:8, 14 miles S of Iconium) and preached the "good news" about salvation through Jesus (14:15). Some Jews came from Antioch and stirred up the people against Paul. As a result of this confrontation, the citizens stoned Paul and left him for dead (14:19), the disciples got Paul and took him back into the city.

Derbe

The next day, both Paul and Silas journeyed to Derbe (14:20, 46 miles SE of Lystra). Luke says, "They **preached the good** news in that city and won a large number of disciples" (14:21). After preaching Jesus in Derbe, Luke reports to his readers that Paul and Barnabas revisited the cities of Lystra, Iconium and Antioch (14:21). Luke summarizes the results of their return to these cities with the following words: "strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to **remain true to the faith**" (14:22). Once more, we observe the phraseology employed to convey the same concept. To say that they "preached the good news" (v. 21) is the same as saying "the faith" (v. 22 = the gospel). "The faith" in verse 22 is objective; this "good news" appears to be the "one faith," according to context, in Ephesians 4:5.

Earlier, Paul in his sermon to the Jews of Pisidian Antioch identifies what "the faith" is all about: "From this man's (David) descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised" (Acts 13:23). After this announcement, he again zeros in on the very heart of the Gospel (the faith):

> Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. [39]Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. (13:38-39)

These verses describe "the faith" in an objective sense. Jesus is the object of subjective faith (who believes).

SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Philippi

Just a brief overview of Paul's second missionary journey also reveals the same scenario. Luke reveals that Paul, Silas, and Timothy wanted to go to the region of Phrygia and Galatia, but the Holy Spirit prevented them from "preaching the word in the province of Asia" (16:6). Eventually, the trio, along with Luke, went into Europe to preach the Good News of God. One of Paul's first converts was Lydia. Luke says that God opened her heart to respond to "Paul's message" (16:14). Following this encounter, a girl followed Paul and Silas shouting: "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling the way to be saved" (16:17). Following this episode, Paul and Silas were arrested and thrown in prison (16:23), Luke informs his readers of an earthquake and the conversion of the jailor. The jailor inquired as to what he must do to be saved. Paul's response was: "Believe in the Lord Jesus" (16:31). But, Luke does not stop with just the phrase "believe in the Lord Jesus"; but rather, he then told him about the One he should believe in. Listen once more to Luke as he recounts this particular event: "Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house" (16:32).

Thessalonica

After this episode, Paul went to Thessalonica, then to Berea, and then to Athens (17:1-32). In Thessalonica many Jews and Gentiles rejected "obedience to the faith." During this second missionary journey, while in Corinth, Paul wrote his second epistle (AD 52) to that congregation in which he issued a warning to those who refused to heed the message of salvation through Christ:

> God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you [7] and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. [8]**He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus**. [9]They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power [10]on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you. (1 Thessalonians 1:6-10)

For one not to "obey the gospel" is to reject Jesus as God's Anointed One. It is the same as that which John addresses when he writes:

> He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. [11]**He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him**. [12]**Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God**—[13]children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. (John 1:10-13)

From the Thessalonian correspondence, we quickly learn that many Jews were not "obedient to the faith," which equals Paul's phraseology "obey the gospel." For one not to obey the Gospel was equivalent to one not being obedient to the faith, which simply means that one does not receive Him.

Berea

Wherever this missionary group converged, they immediately went to the Jewish synagogue to tell them about the message of salvation (Acts 17:11). Luke informs his readers that the Bereans received the message with eagerness (17:11). The Jews from Thessalonica learned of Paul's behavior in Berea and went there to disrupt the "preaching" of Paul. Luke says that "Paul was **preaching the word of God**" at Berea (17:13). We cannot read about the events of Paul and his traveling companions in the various towns without cognizance of

the various synonymous expressions used to describe the Gospel of God. In this short section dealing with the activities concerning the Word, we observe that the preaching about Jesus is called "the message of salvation" (17:11) and "the word of God" (17:13).

Athens

In Athens, Luke identifies the message as "the good news about Jesus and the resurrection" (17:18). Wherever Paul and his companions went, they preached the "one faith" that Paul speaks of in Ephesians 4:5. This "one faith" is the "good news about Jesus and his resurrection." For the full text of Paul's encounter with the Athenians, we should read Acts 17:16-34. Toward the end of Paul's proclamation about Jesus, he says to the Athenians:

> "For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. **He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead**." [32]**When they heard about the resurrection of the dead**, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject." [33]At that, Paul left the Council. [34]A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others. (17:31-34)

Some who heard the message about Jesus and His resurrection were like some of the Jews from Thessalonica; they refused to "obey the gospel" (see 2 Thessalonians 1:8). Some, after hearing the message of salvation, were "obedient to the faith" (see Acts 6:7; Romans 1:5; 16:26). We stand almost awestruck as we catch a glimpse of the various ways the preaching of Jesus is described. The terminology employed helps us to promptly observe that no one term was used exclusively for the "one faith" that Paul chooses in Ephesians to describe the "mystery of God," which is none other than Jesus, the hope of glory.

Corinth

After his visit and preaching in Athens, Paul went to Corinth (Acts 18:1). Immediately Luke focuses his camera on Paul to give Theophilus, the one to whom the book was actually written (1:1), some details as to the activities of Paul in Corinth: "Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks" (18:4). In the meantime, Timothy and Silas joined Paul from Macedonia (18:5). After their arrival, Luke says that Paul now exclusively devoted himself to preaching about Jesus. Once more, we get a clear insight into the core, or heart, of the message of Paul to the Corinthians. Listen to Luke as he captures the gist of the message of salvation:

> When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. [6]But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." (18:5-6)

After Paul moved the base of his operations from the synagogue to the house of Crispus, the synagogue ruler, we discover that God appeared to Paul to give him the spiritual resolve to continue to teach the Corinthians "the word of God" (18:7-12). Paul was informed by God to "keep on speaking, do not be silent." Later, when Paul wrote to the Corinthians (AD 55), he reflected upon his stay: "When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the **testimony about God**. [2] For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except **Jesus Christ and him crucified**" (1 Corinthians 2:1-2). Then as Paul closed this letter, he once more reminded them of his message:

> Now, brothers, **I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you**, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. [2] **By this gospel you are saved**, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. [3]For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, [4] that he was buried, that **he was raised on the third day** according to the Scriptures, [5] and that he

appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. [6]After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. [7]Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, [8]and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. (15:1-8)

"FAITH" IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

About ten years after the first missionary journey (AD 57), Paul writes to the Romans about this faith, which he calls "my gospel" and "the revelation of the mystery":

> Now to Him who is able to establish you according to **my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ**, according to **the revelation of the mystery** kept secret since the world began [26]but now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, **for obedience to the faith**— [27]to God, alone wise, *be* glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen. (Romans 16:25-27, NKJV)

Again, we perceive synonymous expressions employed to describe faith in its objective sense: (1) "my gospel," (2) "preaching of Jesus Christ," (3) "the revelation of the mystery," and (4) "obedience to the faith." In the Book of Romans, we witness Paul employing "faith" sometimes in a subjective sense, but at other times, it is employed in an objective sense. The context is the deciding factor. Just as Paul concludes his Book with "obedience to the faith" (**εἰς ὑπακοὴν πίστεως**, *eis hypakoēn pisteōs*, "for obedience of faith," 16:26) so he begins his Book with the same phraseology (1:5). In 1:3-4, Paul describes the message of the Gospel, in verse 5, he describes what God expects of individuals who hear the message about Christ. This is basically the same scenario that Paul expresses in Romans 10:1-4. In these verses, Paul calls attention to the Jews' refusal of Jesus as the means of receiving God's righteousness. Thus, Paul expresses this rejection of "obedience of faith" as "did not submit to God's righteousness" (10:3). The full context of this section is:

> Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. [2] For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but **their zeal is not based on knowledge**. [3] Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, **they did not submit to God's righteousness**. [4] Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. (10:1-4)

Obedience of Faith
Equals
Submission to God's Righteousness through Jesus

"Obedience of faith" means acceptance of the message of salvation by grace through faith. Whenever Paul speaks of submission to God's righteousness (Romans 10:3), he is essentially saying the same thing in 1:5. It is through faith that we accept the righteousness of God. Subjective faith in Jesus is the means whereby God chooses to make salvation available to us (1:16-17). Listen to Paul following his discourse on Abraham and faith:

> Therefore, since we have been **justified through faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, [2] through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. (5:1-2)

"Through faith" is employed in a subjective sense, but this subjective faith must have for its object Jesus. It is, "We have peace with God **through our Lord Jesus Christ**." Jesus is "the faith." The faith is not a collection of twenty-seven books; the faith is not instrumental music; it is not acappella singing; it is not grape juice or wine only in the Lord's Supper; it is not bread breaking or bread pinching in the observance of the Lord's Supper; **it is the belief that Jesus is the Son of God**, the Savior of the World. This is "the faith" that Paul preached wherever he went. Paul expresses this concept in a most forceful way in his letter to Rome: "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Romans 4:25).

Paul employs "faith" in a subjective sense as well as an objective sense (see Romans 10:1-17). Again, the context is the determinative factor. In writing Romans, we cannot help but wonder if Paul had not reflected upon the words of Jesus to Nicodemus. In Christ's conversation with Nicodemus, He sets forth subjective and objective faith as essential to eternal life. One's subjective faith must have Jesus as its object. Pay attention to Jesus as He explains to Nicodemus how we come to have eternal life:

> For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that **whoever believes in him** shall not perish but have eternal life. [17] For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. [18] **Whoever believes in him** is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. (John 3:16-18)

The object of belief is Jesus. As we read carefully Ephesians 4:5, the context must determine whether the "one faith" is subjective or objective. When we move toward Ephesians 4:5, we detect that many scholars also speak of this "one faith" as subjective, but, at the same time, they call attention to Jesus as the object of this "one faith." Some scholars advance the notion that the "one faith" refers to that quality of faith in the individual, which enables him or her to believe. Yet, the subjective element appears to be expressed already in the "one Lord," the fourth of the seven ones. This concept of the "one faith" as personal (subjective faith) seems to be at odds with the context,[463] even though we must have subjective faith in order to receive the righteousness of Christ. Whatever the answer is to a proper interpretation of "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5, we must never forget that we cannot ultimately separate personal faith from its object (Jesus). On the other hand, we can never separate Jesus from personal faith if we expect salvation

It goes almost without saying that there must be subjective faith in Jesus, but, at the same time, we ought to be conscious as to how Paul employs "one faith" in this context. In other words, there must be faith (subjective) in "the faith" (objective), which is Christ. In Ephesians, Paul employs both usages of the word *faith*. What we turn up in the reading of Ephesians is that subjective faith and objective faith (Jesus the object of faith) are like two sides of a coin. Both must be involved for salvation. Yet, in Ephesians 4:5, the context seems to use "one faith" for the "Gospel." It is in this vein that Klyne Snodgras pungently captures the intent of Paul's use of the phrase:

> "One faith" looks back to the explanation of the gospel in 2:1-10, but reference here is not the act of believing. "Faith" is used here by metonymy for that which is believed, the content of the faith. The statement means there is only one gospel.[464]

The context of Ephesians 4:5 does not appear to use pistis in the subjective sense as utilized by Paul in Romans 1:16-17:

> I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of **everyone who believes**: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. [17]For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed**, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last**, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

This passage (1:16-17) speaks of faith in a subjective sense. God has chosen faith as the means whereby man receives salvation. In Romans 4, Paul speaks of Abraham's faith: "What does the Scripture say? 'Abraham **believed God**, and it was credited to him as righteousness'" (verse 5). This faith is subjective faith on the part of Abraham. Once more, Paul expresses this subjective faith as the means whereby God imputes to man His righteousness:

> And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them (4:11)

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[463]Lloyd-Jones, *Christian Unity: An Exposition of Ephesians 4:1-16* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 107.

[464]Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 199.

Paul begins this epistle (Romans) with a brief synopsis of "the faith" (1:3-4) and then concludes his remarks with submission to that faith (1:5). Keep your mind on Paul as he captures the very heart of the gospel and one's response to Jesus ("the faith"):

> Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—[2]the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures [3] regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, [4]and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. [5] Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. (1:1-5)

The NIV's translation of 1:5 is understood by many as subjective faith, not objective faith as presented in this study. We cannot determine from the translation which meaning the translators intended to convey. In other words, did the translators understand the phraseology as meaning ethical obedience that comes from faith or obedience that results in the acceptance of Jesus as God's Anointed One for the salvation of the world? We are not denying that there must be ethical obedience to the faith once for all delivered to the saints, but the issue in Romans 1:5 is: Is "obedience of faith" the message of salvation? It is in this same vein that Douglas J. Moo oscillates, so it seems to me, between subjective and objective faith in 1:5.[465] Since Paul is not here to clarify the issue for the Christian community, then Christians today must try to arrive at a correct application through the context. Is Paul addressing the same issue in his examination of the Jews' rejection of Jesus? Pay attention to Paul as he deals with "obedience of faith" in Romans 10:8-17:

> But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, **the word of faith we are proclaiming**: [9] That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and **believe in your heart** that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. [10] For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. [11]As the Scripture says, "**Anyone who trusts in him** will never be put to shame." [12] For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, [13] for, "**Everyone who calls** on the name of the Lord will be saved." [14]How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And **how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard**? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? [15]And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" [16] **But not all the Israelites accepted the good news**. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" [17]Consequently, **faith comes from hearing the message**, and the **message is heard through the word of Christ**.

"The word of faith we are proclaiming" is Jesus. This is the same message about Christ in verse 17. Many Israelites rejected the "good news" (verse 16) about Jesus as God's way of salvation. "The word of faith" would be equivalent to the "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5. Robert Haldane (1764-1842), in his monumental commentary on Romans, grappled with this very issue:

> *To the obedience of faith.*—Paul, as an Apostle, was commissioned to preach the Gospel in order to the obedience of faith. Some understand this of the obedience which faith produces; but the usual import of the expression, as well as the connection in this place, determines it to apply to the belief of the Gospel. Obedience is no doubt an effect produced by that belief; but the office of an Apostle was, in the first place, to persuade men to believe the Gospel. This is the grand object, which includes the other. The Gospel reforms those who believe it; but it would be presenting an imperfect view of the subject to say that it was given to reform the world. It was given that men might believe and be saved. The obedience, then, here referred to, signifies submission to the doctrine of the gospel.[466]

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[465]Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 41-43. He has some excellent comments, but, at the same time, the phrase, so it seems, in light of its context, still bears the earmark of submission to the message of the Gospel.

[466]Robert Haldane, *An Exposition of Romans*, reprinted 1971 (Marshalltown, Delaware: The National Foundation for Christian Education, original date not given), 30-31.

"FAITH" IN THE BOOK OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

A few years earlier (AD 54), Paul wrote to the Corinthians about "the gospel I preached to you" (1 Corinthians 15:1). But he does not stop with just that statement; he continues to define what it was that he preached (15:2-4). As Paul wraps up this epistle, he writes: "Be on your guard; stand firm in **the faith**; be men of courage; be strong" (16:13). Paul begins this epistle with both objective faith (the message) and subjective faith (belief on the part of those who responded to the message of salvation:

> For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, **God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.** [22] Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, [23] but **we preach Christ crucified**: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, [24] but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. [25] For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength. (1:21-25)

"The foolishness of what was preached" is objective faith (Jesus crucified), but the words, "to save those who believe" is subjective faith. The Corinthians were to "stand firm in **the faith**." One can hardly read "the faith" in the Corinthians passage without reflecting, once more, upon the context in Ephesians 4:5, which appears to focus on Jesus as God's liberating initiative to bring about peace and break down the wall of partition that separates Jews and Gentiles (Ephesians 2:11-22). One must emphasize, and not forget, that subjective faith has as its object the Anointed One of God. "The faith" in 1 Corinthians 16:13 and the "one faith" (μία πίστις, *mia pistis*) in Ephesians 4:5 and "obedience of faith" in Romans 1:5 and "the faith" in Colossians 1:23 seem to refer to the same thing, namely, the gospel of hope. In the Colossians' passage, Paul writes:

> If indeed you continue in **the faith** (**τῇ πίστει**, *tē pistei*), grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister. (Colossians 1:23) [NKJV]

The context of this statement—"continue in the faith"—appears to be Christ, the hope of glory. As one reflects upon the fuller context, one quickly discovers that Paul identifies "the faith" as Christ. Take note once more to Paul as he expounds upon his thoughts in 1:23:

> I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, [25]of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, [26]**the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations**, but now has been revealed to His saints. [27]To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of **this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory**. [28]Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. [29]To this *end* I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily. (1:24-29) [NKJV]

From this context, it appears that "the faith" equals "the mystery" and "the mystery" equals "Christ, the hope of glory."

Even if we interpret, as many commentators do, "one faith" as subjective in Ephesians 4:5 and not as objective, we must also observe that these same scholars also advance the idea that Christ is the object of this subjective faith, not some creedal statement as postulated by the various religious bodies. For example, H.C.G. Moule addresses the controversy this way as he seeks to correct the erroneous view that the "one faith" is a creed, unless we speak of this creed as Christ:

> Πίστις (*Pistis*) is here explained not of the Christian's creed but of the Christians trust. I believe this to be required, or at least strongly suggested by the general use of the word **πίστις** (*pistis*) in the writings of Paul. Hardly ever, if ever, does he use it distinctly in the sense of creed. Of course some "creed," however brief is required in order to "trust," if it is to be trust in the trustworthy Object. But this is not in question where we are examining the use of the word **πίστις** (*pistis*).

If faith is subjective, Moule is saying that Jesus is still the object of this subjective faith. Jesus is the creed. If "one faith" were creedal in nature, then this "one faith" would be Jesus, the hope of glory. Even though Moule interprets "one faith" as subjective, he still speaks of Christ as the object of this "one faith." He does reject the "one faith" as a compendium of theology, that is to say, a partisan creed. In this same vein of "one faith" as subjective, Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene A. Nida are forthright in their criticism of interpreting the "one faith" as a creed, that is to say, "a compendium of theology":

> One faith: the Christian message is one, not many, and it calls for the same faith, belief, commitment from all who accept it. It is doubtful that here the Greek word for "faith" means "creed" (as Murray would define it). In this context one faith must refer to "one way in which we may trust God" or . . . " trust Christ."[467]

These two scholars deny that the "one faith" is creedal in nature, but, on the other hand, both appear to be saying that the "one faith" is subjective with Christ as its object. We cannot deny that there is subjectivity on the part of the one who looks to Christ as the author and finisher of his or her salvation, but if we place emphasis upon a written creed (objective—compendium of theology) and not upon "the faith," namely Jesus, then we weaken, to some extent, the thrust of Paul's arguments concerning Jesus as the unifying factor in reconciling the world unto Himself.[468]

It is difficult for scholars to choose between the subjective and objective sense, especially since it is almost impossible to separate the two concepts in an absolute sense. Neither concept can be far from the other. William Hendrickson expresses his views about the subjective nature of the "one faith," but he also cautions that we cannot separate the two:

> Favoring the objective sense are Westcott and Lenski ("one truth"), though it is only fair to state that the latter does not entirely exclude the subjective meaning. He says, '"One faith' includes our personal believing, but the stress is on the Christian faith as such, on what constitutes its substance." Simpson refuses to choose. Hodge and Greijdanus accept the theory that the term as here used combines subjective and objective faith. Abbott, Grosheide, Roberson, and Scott favor the subjective sense (footnote 101).[469]

This controversy appears, so it seems to me, to be the case of scholars not reading the book as a book. They isolate this passage (Ephesians 4:5) from its context.[470] The seven ones are an absolute proof of unity. It appears that Paul is setting forth something that is outside oneself (Jesus as the object of our subjective faith) in order to withstand objective attacks against Jesus as God's way of salvation, which is the "one faith." Just a perusal of the Book of Ephesians reveals that "faith" is employed in both senses in this epistle. Subjective faith in Jesus is the means by which God has chosen to redeem humanity (see Ephesians 1:13; 2:8; 3:12, 17; see also Romans 1:16-17). Salvation is by God's grace through faith in Jesus (Ephesians 2:8). In Ephesians 4:5, Paul, so it seems, is appealing to something that can unite fallen humanity. Whether one interprets the "one faith" as subjective or objective does not detract from Paul's emphasis about unity. In other words, it is only subjective faith in Jesus as its object that can unite humanity into "one new man" (2:10-18).

Faith in Jesus puts everyone on an equal footing, not knowledge. If "one faith" refers to a compendium of creedal statements, whether written or unwritten, then unity cannot exist.[471] This faith, even though objective, is something that puts one into a right relationship with God. Jesus is the only one who can accomplish this feat. He is the message of salvation. The backdrop of this epistle does seem to indicate that the "one faith" is objective. Whether one interprets the "one faith" as personal (inward faith) or objective (Jesus), we cannot be

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[467]Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene A. Nida, *Paul's Letter to the Ephesians*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1982), 96.

[468]See William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Ephesians* New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967), 186.

[469]Ibid., 187.

[470]This concept will be dealt with more fully under an analysis of "faith" in Ephesians.

[471]It is not uncommon for some individuals within the Churches of Christ as well as other religious bodies to deny that they have a written creed. On the surface this sounds excellent; but this is not true. The various religious journals advance a certain doctrinal stance, and then this becomes in essence the written creed for that particular body of believers. To disagree with the editors and church leaders of the various religious journals is, often times, tantamount to disagreeing with God Himself.

too dogmatic in our presuppositions. In the Ephesian epistle, Paul discusses both subjective and objective faith. Kenneth S. Wuest (1893-1962), New Testament Greek scholar and professor of New Testament Greek at Moody Bible Institute, also advances the idea that the "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5 is subjective. In the following statement by Wuest, he also calls attention to the fact that the "one faith" is not some human creed. He writes:

> "Faith" is not the Christian Faith as a system of doctrine and its respective responsibilities. It refers to the principle of faith by means of which all the saints enter into salvation.[472]

We can concur with Wuest's statement that the "Christian Faith" cannot be a "system of doctrine." As we read the scholars, we discover that over and over the scholars draw attention to the fact that the "one faith" cannot be a religious creed. Why? Just a perusal of the religious scene reveals that a "compendium of theology" can never unite. This observation is self-evident from the many divisions that currently exist within the Stone/Campbell Movement. Carl Ketcherside (1908-1989), author and editor, goes right to the heart of the cancer that inflicts almost every division within the Churches of Christ who interpret the "one faith" as creedal in nature, that is, partisan creeds, not Jesus as the creed:

> It is a startling commentary on the destructive violence of the party spirit when one realizes that otherwise good and gentle men are betrayed into equating the faith which all of us share in Christ Jesus with narrow partisan tests of communion.[473]

Both Wuest and Ketcherside reject the "one faith" as a creedal statement concerning "a compendium of theology." Even for those scholars who interpret the "one faith" subjectively, they see the "one faith" as subjective in the sense that "faith" is the one means whereby God saves humanity through Jesus. Even with this understanding though, the scholars still set forth the notion that Jesus is the object of one's faith. In other words, "faith" is the means, or the instrument, through which God imputes His righteousness to those who put their trust in Jesus as Lord. As stated earlier, it is very difficult to draw a sharp distinction between subjective faith and objective faith, which in essence are simply two sides of the same coin. One necessitates the other. It is by faith (subjective) that all share in the "one body" of Christ. Once more, Carl Ketcherside captures the essence of this "one faith" or "the faith" in his precise commentary on Ephesians 4:5. He correctly writes that the "one faith" is Jesus and not a compendium of theology:

> Compendium of moral principles, a code of ethics, or a compilation of laws. . . . It is the firm conviction that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God and that he "was put to death for our trespasses, and raised for our justification" (Romans 4:25). [474]

"FAITH" IN THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

Objective Faith (Jesus)

As stated above, we must consider the context of Ephesians 4:5 in order to ascertain the intended meaning Paul attaches to this particular phrase—"one faith." He begins his epistle with the thought that God had blessed the Ephesian Christians with all spiritual blessings in Christ (1:3-6). He informs them that it is in

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[472]Kenneth S. Wuest, *Ephesians and Colossians in the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 96. Wuest may be correct in his analysis, but the whole context of the passage does not seem to bear out the conclusions of many godly scholars. If we would read the entire Book of Ephesians, we would discover that Paul, prior to his statement in Chapter 4 and verse 5, develops the scheme of God's redemptive history in Jesus Christ. Everything centers on Jesus as the One who unites fragmented humanity. He is our peace who has broken down the middle wall of partition.

[473]Carl Ketcherside, "The One Faith," *Mission Messenger* 27, no., 10 (October 1965): 149.

[474]Ibid., 148.

Christ that we obtain redemption through the blood of Jesus (1:7). He also calls attention to the mystery of God as to how He could justify sinful humanity:

> And he made known to us **the mystery of his will** according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, [10] to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. (1:9-10)

F. F. Bruce (1910-1990), Bible scholar and professor of biblical criticism and exegesis, equates the "mystery of Christ" with the "revelation of Jesus Christ" (cf. Galatians 1:12).[475] In other words, the "mystery of Christ" equals the "revelation of Jesus Christ" and the "gospel" equals both. Bruce says, "Christ is himself the mystery of God (Col. 2:2; cf. Col. 1:26-27)."[476] This "mystery" is defined in Ephesians 2:14-16, which is the creation in Christ of "one new man" (verse 15). This background helps to explain the phrase "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5.

As Paul reflects upon God's method of salvation, he reflects upon the Gospel and their response:

> And you also were included in Christ when **you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation**. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, [14]who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory. (1:13-14)

This "word of truth" and the "gospel of your salvation" are equivalent expressions to the "one faith." Paul prayed that their eyes might be opened to understand something of the greatness of what God had accomplished in raising them from the dead (1:18—2:1-10). He further develops the fact that they were "dead in transgressions" (2:5, KJV). For instance, he informs them that

> **God raised us up with Christ** and **seated us with him** in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, [7] in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, **expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus**. [8]**For it is by grace you have been saved, through fai**th—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— [9] not by works, so that no one can boast. [10]For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (2:6-10)

The object of this saving faith is Jesus. After Paul zeros in on "the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation" (1:13, KJV), he then states their response to this gospel: "For this reason, ever since I heard about **your faith in the Lord Jesus** and your love for all the saints, [16]I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers" (1:15-16). Again, Paul does not stop there; he continues to develop this gospel with the following words: "And God **raised us up with Christ** and **seated us with him** in the heavenly realms **in Christ Jesus**, [7] in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, **expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus**" (2:6-7). As cited above, Paul again expresses the means of salvation: "For it is by grace you have been saved, **through faith**" (2:8).

In the second chapter of Ephesians (vv. 11-22), Paul describes what the "one faith" is all about. Then in Chapter 3, he develops this "one faith" even further by describing the "one faith" as the "mystery," which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. It is here that T. K. Abbott has a relevant word: "One Lord, Christ; one faith, of which He is the object, one in its nature and essence; and one baptism, by which we are brought into the profession of this faith."[477] Whether we interpret faith as subjective, as Abbott, or objective (Jesus), the meaning is basically the same. In other words, even if faith is used subjectively, the object of our personal faith is in Jesus, not some compendium of theology advanced by some group within the Christian community.

The object of faith is none other than Jesus the Messiah. Again, Paul emphasizes the object of subjective faith with the following words: "For **through him** we both have access to the Father by one Spirit" (2:18). Paul,

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[475]F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 313.

[476] Ibid.

[477]T. K. Abbott, *The Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, nd, latest impression 1991), 109.

throughout this short epistle, widens the "one faith." In Chapter 3, verses 2-13, he discusses the "mystery" that he introduced in the beginning of this epistle (1:3-13). In Chapter 3, he writes: "This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise **in Christ Jesus**" (3:6). He then follows this statement with the following thought: "**In him** and **through faith in him** we may approach God with freedom and confidence" (3:12). The Greek text reads "through **the faith** of (in) him" (**διὰ τῆς πίστεως αὐτοῦ**, *dia tēs pisteōs autou*). This comment by Paul is similar to a statement made some years earlier to the Galatians:

> We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' [16] know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by **faith in Jesus Christ**. So we, too, **have put our faith in Christ Jesus** that we may be justified **by faith in Christ** and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified. (Galatians 2:15-16)

The words "by faith in Jesus Christ" (**διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ**, *dia pisteōs Christou*, "through faith of [in] Christ") emphasize both the subjective (inward faith) and objective faith (Jesus). Then, in this same verse, Paul says, "So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus" (**ἡμεῖς εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεύσαμεν**, *hēmeis eis Christon Iēsoun episteusamen*, "We in Christ Jesus believed"). Paul does not stop there; he does not want his readers to misunderstand how an individual is put in a right relationship with God. Again, he nails the point to the wall, so to speak: "justified by faith in Christ" (**δικαιωθῶμεν ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ**, *dikaiōthōmen ek pisteōs Christou*, "we might be justified by faith of [in] Christ"). F. F. Bruce does well to remind believers that

> It is by this surpassingly rich grace of God, then, that salvation is secured for men and women. As in v. 5, "you have been saved" is equivalent to "you have been justified." What Paul says here about salvation he says elsewhere about justification, which is freely bestowed by God's grace (Rom. 3:24) and received "not on the ground of legal works but through faith in Jesus Christ" (Gal. 2:16). "Through faith" here implies Jesus Christ as the object of that faith, as he is explicitly its object in Gal. 2:16 and Rom. 3:22, 26.[478]

In Ephesians 3:12 and 3:17, Paul, in speaking of faith, utilizes the definite article before faith in both verses.[479] Verse 17 reads: "So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love" (**διὰ τῆς πίστεως**. *dia tēs pisteōs*, "through the faith"). Can we proclaim, or preach, "the faith"? Paul in his epistle to the Galatians writes:

> Later I went to Syria and Cilicia. [22] I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. [23] They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now **preaching the faith** he once tried to destroy." (Galatians 1:21-23)

These verses show that "preaching the faith" can function for Paul as a synonym for "the gospel." Richard B. Hays, professor of New Testament at Duke Divinity School in Durham, North Carolina, correctly calls attention to the import of this passage (v. 23) in Galatians:

> The expression "proclaiming the faith" in v. 23 also shows that "the faith" can function for Paul as a synonym for "the gospel." "The faith" is not just a matter of inward attitudes of the heart; it alludes to the substantive content of Christian preaching, as summarized in kerygmatic formulas such as Gal 1:3-4 and 1 Corinthians 15:3-5. This observation will prove important in interpreting other references to "faith" (**πίστις,** pistis *pistis*) later in the letter.[480]

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[478]F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians*, 289.

[479]The definite article is often confusing in trying to arrive at the significance or its emphasis. The following note on the definite article in First Timothy 3:9 by Jerome D. Quinn and William C. Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, Eerdman's Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 273, is worthwhile reading:

> 9. but persons who hold the *mystery of the faith*. This marks one of fifteen uses of *pistis* in the PE with the article (versus eighteen anarthrous uses). Just as the appearance of the article does not designate the faith in terms of content in the PE, so the absence thereof does not signal simply the personal act of believing. The use (or nonuse) of the article has less to do with systematic theological distinctions than with the grammatical and rhetorical patterns of Hellenistic Greek.

[480]Richard B. Hayes, *The Letter to the Galatians* in The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol., XI (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 217.

Objective Faith (Compendium of Theology)

Sometimes it is helpful to state a proposition in the negative in order to shed more light on its real meaning. The following is a brief analysis as to why I reject the traditional interpretation of the "one faith" as objective in the sense of a "party interpretation" of Scripture. As we glance at the "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5, we have to determine in what sense Paul is employing the expression "one faith." Is it a "compendium of theology" or is it "Jesus"? Upon a close reading, at least to me, we are cognizant that "faith" is objective, namely, Jesus. Yet, in spite of the context, many still want to hold on to "one faith" as representative of their particular brand of Christianity, but the question remains as to the meaning that we should attach to this objectivity. Among many Christian communities, the most prevalent concept is that it is objective in the sense that it represents a theological party creed, but this philosophy is riddled with insurmountable problems.

CHURCHES OF CHRIST AND THEIR DILEMMA

To illustrate the misapplication of Ephesians 4:5, this chapter names godly men who seek to be true to God, but, at the same time, we discover that these men are promoting division rather than the unity for which Paul calls for in Ephesians. The unity for which Paul calls in the Ephesian Epistle is based upon faith in the one Lord Jesus. Garland Elkins (Church of Christ), on the other hand, identifies the "one faith," not as faith in the one Lord, but rather his particular understanding of the so-called five acts of worship. Elkins writes an article on "The Silence of the Scriptures" in which he bemoans the fact that there are fellowships of believers who do not concur with his brand of orthodoxy. In this essay he discusses the so-called five acts of worship. In the following lengthy citation, he sets forth his understanding of the "one faith" as being associated with a worship service with five prescribed rituals within the Churches of Christ:

> These five acts of worship were the *only acts* of worship that the early church practiced. We search in vain for any other acts of worship enjoined upon Christians today. Therefore to count beads as an act of worship is sinful. . . . The Bible does not say, "Thou shalt not use mechanical instruments of music in worship." . . . One of the major differences between the churches of Christ and the Christian churches is: true churches of Christ are governed by what the Bible says. Christian churches are governed by what the Bible does not say. . . . The aim of true churches of Christ throughout the world is to restore Christianity as it was in the first century A.D. . . . In the final analysis whether people obey or disobey God is a matter of regard or disregard for the word of God. The only possible way for us to be united is to follow the simple plan of "speaking where the Bible speaks and by remaining silent where the Bible is silent" (1 Peter 4:11). . . . No one was ever asked, "Are you Protestant or Catholic?" for such did not exist. No one asked, "To which faith do you belong?" for there was only one faith (Eph. 4:5). In a divided religious world the pleas of true churches of Christ everywhere is for a complete restoration of the Lord's church. We plead for people to go back over all the dark ages of corruption, to discard man-made names, creeds, doctrines, and commandments of men in the plan of salvation and worship.[481]

Elkins (1926-2016) identifies the five acts of worship as: (**1**) teaching, (**2**) praying, (**3**) giving, (**4**) Lord's Supper, and (**5**) singing.[482] Elkins labors under the impression that God has ordained a worship service in which five acts (rituals) must be performed in a prescribed manner in order for worship to be "true worship."[483] For those who do not conform to his particular interpretation of Scripture, they are not contending for the "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5.[484] Not only does he identify the "one faith" with five acts of worship, but he also identifies the Church of Christ as the "one faith." He excludes any other religious denomination from being a part of the "one faith." For us to be in the "one faith," we must be identified with his social gathering.

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[481]Garland Elkins, "The Silence of the Scriptures," *The Spiritual Sword* 5, no., 1 (October 1973): 19-20.
[482]Ibid., 19.
[483]Ibid.
[484]Ibid., 20.

He says, as cited in the above citation: "No one was ever asked, 'Are you Protestant or Catholic?' for such did not exist. No one asked, 'To which faith do you belong?' for there was only one faith (Eph. 4:5)." He excludes everyone from the "one faith" except his own splinter group. In his exposition of the "one faith," he fails to take into consideration that the distinctive religious body known as the Churches of Christ, which came out of the Stone/Campbell Movement, of which he is a part, did not exist prior to Alexander Campbell, one of the principle founders of this Reformation Movement.

On the other side of Elkins' unique fellowship, there is another exclusive association that is known as the one-cup and non-Sunday school movement within the Churches of Christ. This group of Christians also cites this same verse to condemn Elkins. Why? Well, according to their understanding of the New Testament, he is not adhering to the "one faith," which happens to be the one-cup, non-Sunday school, grape juice only, bread pinchers (the bread must remain in one piece—no fragmentation), and so on. They, like him, identify the "one faith," not with Jesus, but rather with their odd interpretation of the so-called worship service with its five rituals. Just a casual reading of Ephesians reveals that the "one faith" is not some creedal statement issued by the Churches of Christ, but rather, it is the "one Lord." Jesus is the "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5.

This "one faith," as illustrated above, is the message of the Gospel, or the Word of God. If we interpret "one faith" as objective faith in the sense of a written creed, we again confront an impossible blockage. There is difficulty in applying this expression to a particular body of truth as is generally advanced by many within the Churches of Christ as well as other religious bodies. In seeking an answer to the above dilemma, we must inquire as to the following question: Is Paul speaking of an objective body of truth? Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981), protestant Christian minister, carefully calls attention to the difficulty:

> In the eyes of these teachers 'one faith' means that Christians adopt and subscribe to one of the great Confessions of Faith, such as the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England., or the Westminster confession of Faith, or the Heidelberg Catechism. Faith here, they say, means a complete outline of what we believe, a compete compendium of theology.[485]

Even though some Christians reject the many Confessions of Faith written by other believers, nevertheless, many of these same Christians adhere to an unwritten creed that is just as dogmatic and divisive as the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, and so on. When we set forth a doctrinal standard by which all must adhere to or face excommunication, we immediately catapult a movement that will fracture at the drop-of-a-hat. If we define "one faith" as dogmatic theology propounded by some meticulous group of believers, then there has never been nor will there ever be "one faith." If "one faith" means agreement upon all doctrinal issues, then there was not even "one faith" in the days of the apostles. Thus, Leroy Garrett (b. 1918), author and editor, correctly points out:

> On and on it goes. We are judged more by what doctrines we hold to than by the hold we have on Jesus. One is not "faithful" unless he is acappella or non-class or amillennial or non-cooperative or direct support. A congregation is not of "the faith" unless it serves the Supper in a certain manner or restricts its budget to non-institutional programs. "Obedience to the faith," a beautiful scriptural concept, is made to apply to every opinion imaginable, and if one does not kow-tow to a particular opinion, held to so dearly by the party, he is branded as *unfaithful*. And so we "convert" each other to our own sects, announcing to the world that someone has found "the faith" and is no longer in error. This usually has little to do with a person's relationship to Jesus as Lord. If one leaves us, we presume that he has "departed from the faith," when in fact he just might leave us for the sake of the faith.[486]

We cannot take the "one faith" to mean complete agreement about an absolute digest of doctrinal declaration in the written Word. For us to make the "one faith" mean total compliance in doctrinal matters, then our understanding would violate the very intent of this epistle. One thing that the scholars agree on is this: the "one faith" is not a system of dogmatic theology. Most scholars rule out this objective sense of a "compendium

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[485]Lloyd-Jones, *Christian Unity: An Exposition of Ephesians 4:1 to 16*), 108. I am indebted to Lloyd-Jones for his exposition of this phrase.

[486]Leroy Garrett, "The Nature of Faith," *Restoration Review* 18, no., 6 (June 1976): 303.

of theology," period. In the early church, there were differences in understanding concerning many issues, but they were not accused of preaching another gospel, unless they added something to Jesus as God's way of salvation. For example, Paul's letter to the Corinthians reveals that Paul was conscious that within the Christian community believers were at various levels in understanding, but they were never accused of departing from "the faith." We should listen in on Paul as he discusses limited knowledge within the Corinthian congregation. He writes:

> Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. [2] **The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know**. [3] But the man who loves God is known by God. (1 Corinthians 8:1-3)

Within this short paragraph, Paul calls attention to the fact that no one knows everything, as he or she ought to know. Even though some laid claim to "we all possess knowledge," nevertheless they were warned that knowledge can puff an individual up, but, on the other hand, love can build one up. It is true that some were right and some were wrong in their views concerning idols; yet, in spite of this deficiency in knowledge, Paul drove home the point that if one loves God, then God knows this individual, in spite of famine in discernment. Just a perusal of the eighth chapter of First Corinthians reveals ignorance, on the part of some, concerning the Lord Jesus. Listen once more to Paul as he calls for toleration for the weak:

> Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. [7] **But not everyone knows this**. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. [8] But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do. (8:6-8)

Paul is conscious that there is just one God, the Father, and one Lord Jesus Christ, but he goes on to say, "Not everyone knows this." For a second time, we wonder why Paul did not accuse the weak Christians of abandoning the "one faith." How did Paul deal with the ones who did not get the picture flawlessly? Again, we should pay attention to Paul as he seeks to capture the very heart of unity among the Corinthians:

> Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. [10] For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? [11] So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. [12] When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. (8:9-12)

Paul, too, deals with differences within the congregation at Rome. This epistle to the Romans is quite revealing in that Paul details how Christians are to get along, even when there were different viewpoints. Chapters fourteen and fifteen of Romans go to the very core of Christian unity in spite of a lack of understanding. Listen to the following admonitions:

> **Accept him whose faith is weak**, without passing judgment on disputable matters. [2] One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. (Romans 14:1-2)

> **Who are you to judge someone else's servant**? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. (14:4)

> One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike**. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind**. (14:5)

> **Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you**, in order to bring praise to God. (15:7)

If an individual refuses to practice the spirit of toleration toward the weak, Paul warns the Christians at Rome to keep an eye on the brother who refuses to make allowances for differences (16:17). It is difficult for

many Christians to read the Scriptures with correct understanding because of their traditions. The faith of the fathers frequently becomes the watchword of orthodoxy. We must continue to hammer away at the traditions that divide God's people. Another Christian writer who does not subscribe to the "one faith" as equivalent to the message of the Gospel is Goebel Music. Music, like so many leaders within the Churches of Christ, applies Ephesians 4:5 to the theological creed of his particular party. He, too, laments that

> The great and beloved body of Christ today is being ripped apart by the sawblade of insidious doctrines, one such being that of "Unity in Diversity." This is one of the most treacherous, double-tongued, underhanded, delusive, guileful, cunning, slippery, intriguing, crooked, questionable, fishy and deceitful doctrines and must be met with a head-on onslaught! It is totally unbiblical, completely sectarian and has nothing at all to do with New Testament Christianity. . . . Before there can be real unity, there must be a unity of faith. Paul, in Ephesians 4, tells us of the "Unity Platform." Unity in diversity is an insidious doctrine and the answer is simple. The Bible never talks about, anywhere, diversity of faiths! However, it talks repeatedly about THE ONE FAITH! And we are told to believe the same thing so we can speak the same thing (1 Cor. 1:10).[487]

His overall views concerning Ephesians 4:5 are not supported by the context. We cannot question his statement: "Before there can be real unity, there must be a unity of faith."[488] But the problem with his exposition is that he equates the "unity of faith" with his particular brand of orthodoxy. Again, he is correct when he writes, "The Bible never talks about, anywhere, diversity of faiths!" But what does Music mean by the "diversity of faiths"? He is writing about Christians who use instrumental music, and Christians who advance the biblical concept of "unity in diversity" as holding to another gospel. To strengthen his religious reasoning, he incorrectly applies 1 Corinthians 1:10 to reinforce his misapplication of Ephesians 4:5.

Just a brief reading of First Corinthians, as demonstrated above, reveals his misapplication of 1 Corinthians 1:10.[489] Whatever Paul is saying in this passage cannot possibly be what Music is saying. Otherwise, this passage would contradict Chapters 8 through 13 of 1 Corinthians. The "one faith" is the message of the gospel, not instrumental music, not Sunday school, not grape juice only, not wine only, not Bible colleges, and so on. He identifies the "one faith" with his understanding of the Bible in references to these issues. Focus, once more, on Music as he seeks to elaborate on his concept of the "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5:

> Anything else is a splattered unity, or perhaps I should say, union. It is a systematized and sectarianized unity for joining the church of your choice and bringing the instrument in the "back door." There is just one faith, just like there is one Lord. There are no more faiths than there are Lords.[490]

Yet again, we cannot deny his statement: "there is just one faith, just like there is one Lord." What we do deny, and we must deny, is his equation of the "one faith" with his identifying mark of prevailing attitude—my interpretation and application. In essence, he interprets the "one faith" as his understanding of the Bible. When we advance dogmatic theology as the "one faith," then this belief system opens a Pandora's Box. This incredible philosophy, advanced by Elkins and Music, has sliced the body of Christ into warring factions that are constantly at each other's throats. The interpretation that is in vogue among many Churches of Christ and other religious denominations forces the philosophy of "unity-in-conformity," not "unity-in-diversity." In fact, most of the party journals within the Churches of Christ belittle "unity-in-diversity" as of the devil.

If we reflect upon the consequences of the outcome of the "one faith" as a compendium of theology, then we must acknowledge that there is something wrong with the traditional interpretation. The "one faith" cannot possibly be a complete system of theology. Christians can no more all think alike on every subject than they can all look alike. Carl Ketcherside, as cited earlier, correctly says:

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[487]Goebel Music, "The Challenge of 'Unity in Diversity,'" *The Spiritual Sword* 12, no., 1 (October 1980): 19, 21.

[488]Ibid., 21.

[489]For an analysis of 1 Corinthians 1:10, see Chapter 16 (Speak the Same Thing) in this book (Old Texts through New Eyes), 317-331.

[490]Ibid.

> The one faith is not a compendium of moral principles, a code of ethics, or a compilation of laws. It is not a collection of letters, even though divinely authorized and produced by agency of the Spirit. It is the firm conviction that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God and that he "was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Romans 4:25).[491]

We observe that Ketcherside defines the "one faith" as Jesus. The traditional interpretation of Ephesians 4:5 fractures the body of Christ rather than unites the body of Christ. Within the Churches of Christ there are as many *faiths* as there are splinter groups if we interpret "one faith" with doctrinal issues. When we interpret "one faith" as *acappella* singing, instrumental music, wine only, grape juice only, one container in the Lord's Supper, individual cups in the Lord's Supper, breaking bread, pinching bread, orphan homes, Bible colleges, located preachers, baptisteries, women not cutting their hair, women wearing hats in the assembly, and so on, we create an atmosphere in which division proliferates. Another citation from Garrett is to the point:

> This is the nature of faith. It is rooted in a Person, the one who is the bread come down out of heaven. It is not loyalty to any doctrinal system, however praiseworthy be that system. It is a mark of sectarianism to regard faith as assent to a particular set of tenets. Our *faithful* brothers and sisters are all those everywhere who are in Christ Jesus, implicitly trusting in him as the Lord of their lives.[492]

For many Christians the "one faith" amounts to "one opinion." The "one faith" does not consist of a so-called new law, which is generally interpreted as the New Testament. As a whole, within the Churches of Christ, the "one faith" is boiled down to its lowest common denominator—one opinion. Alexander Campbell, the founder of the denominational Church of Christ[493] also known as the Stone/Campbell Movement, once said with his typical pungency:

> The Apostle says, 'There is one body, one spirit (sic), one hope, one Lord, one faith, one immersion, one God and Father of all.' **But nowhere is it said in the sacred book, There is *one opinion***. If however, unity of opinion were desirable, to attain it, we must give the greatest liberty of opinion; for though once theory with us, it is now matter of experience, that the more stress is laid upon unity of opinion, the less of it, and the more division; and the less regard paid to it, the less emphasis laid upon it, the more we will have of it. This is founded in a law of the human mind, on which it is unseasonable and unnecessary to expatiate ("expound"—RDB).[494]

God has never made faultlessness in knowledge a condition of salvation. If He had, none could be saved. Just a casual glance at 1 Corinthians 8 and Romans 14 and 15 dispel any such belief. This analysis of the subjective (personal faith, which is essential for salvation) and objective (compendium of theology, which is not essential for salvation) faith brings us to the very heart of the "one faith" included in the seven ones, which are essential for Christian unity.

As we study the various factions within the Churches of Christ, we quickly realize that an interpretation of "the faith" depends upon each controversial company of saints. No two parties define "the faith" the same way. Instead of "one faith," as stated earlier, there are as many faiths as there are splinter groups. Ketcherside has rightly picked up the folly of assigning a meaning to the "one faith" as a compendium of theology:

> To postulate that one must have perfect knowledge of every detail of revelation is to require inerrancy and infallibility and to demand that he be God. This is what I call "the Haman's gallows argument." If it is affirmed that fellowship with ourselves is contingent upon knowing all we know and understanding everything as we do, then our fellowship with God is dependent upon our knowing all that God knows and understanding everything as He does. Since no one is rash enough

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[491]Carl Ketcherside, "The One Faith," *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 10 (October 1965): 148.

[492]Leroy Garrett, "The Nature of Faith," *Restoration Review* 18, no., 6 (June 1976): 305.

[493]Many Christians in this movement identify the Churches of Christ as having started in AD 33. Those outside this particular body of believers are not Christians. If we wish to understand the true nature of the church, I suggest that everyone read Emil Brunner, *Misunderstanding of the Church* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1952).

[494]Alexander Campbell, "To Mr. William Jones, of London, Letter IV," *Millennial Harbinger* 6, no. 3 (March 1835):111-112.

to claim this for himself, he admits he is not in fellowship with God, and damns himself by the argument he concocted to deny others. "By what judgment you judge you will be judged."[495]

CONCLUSION

The "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5 is Jesus. This faith proclaims what Jesus has done for humanity. In other words, this "one faith" is the very heart of the Gospel. When one ponders upon this "one faith," one mulls over the centrality of the cross of Jesus. This "one faith" is about the Atonement and Resurrection of Christ in which He put away the sins of the world. This "one faith" is about the central truth of the Gospel—Jesus who gave Himself for our sins. The "one faith" that Paul addresses in the Ephesian Epistle is the very essence of the Gospel—"who reconciled us to himself through Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:18). We can only appropriate Christ through faith (personal). We believe that God sent His Son to die for our salvation.

This faith is something upon which we must agree. This "one faith" must be a belief in the "one Lord." This is the message that is at the very heart of the "one faith" that Paul emphasizes in the unity section (Ephesians 4:1-6). This "one faith" cuts across all barriers and unites all who put their trust in Jesus for liberation. Again, Paul expresses this "one faith" is the beginning of his first letter to Corinth:

> It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. [31] Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 1:30-31)

How do we appropriate this "one faith"? It is through faith, or trust, in Jesus, not through works. This is the substance of Paul's letter to the Romans.

> I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. [17] For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "**The righteous will live by faith**." (Romans 1:16-17)

The Gospel is the "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5. This is the one message that Paul carefully and thoughtfully develops in the Book of Romans. The first four chapters of Romans are dedicated to this great theme of justification by faith. For Paul, justification begins and ends with faith. It is all God's doing. Prior to the coming of Christ, Paul emphasizes that the Jews were under Law, but with the coming of Christ something new came. Paul explains this "one faith" this way:

> But now **a righteousness from God, apart from law**, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. [22] **This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe**. There is no difference, [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. [25] **God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement**, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— [26] he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:21-26)

Paul had just painted a rather dismal picture of humanity under Law. Then he uses two of the greatest words in all of the human language—"**but now**"—to express the "one faith." The Book of Romans (AD 57) is an excellent commentary on the "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5. Take note once more to the words of Paul as he zeros in on the very core of the "one faith":

> "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: [9] That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. [10] For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. [11] As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." (Romans 10:8-11)

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[495] Carl Ketcherside, "The One Faith," Mission *Messenger* 27, no. 10 (October 1965): 152.

What is the "word of faith" that Paul proclaims? It is (1) "Jesus is Lord" and (2) His Resurrection. We must respond to the message of the Cross ("one faith") with a vital personal faith (1:16-17; 4:3). How does this living or subjective faith in Jesus come about? This kind of faith is generated through the proclamation of the Gospel: "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (10:17). We who hear this announcement **about** Christ and believe will be saved. Listen once more to Paul as he writes: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (10:13). In the fourth chapter of Romans, Paul develops the "one faith," which is God's method of salvation—Jesus. In speaking of Abraham's faith, Paul informs his readers that what was said to Abraham was also said for the benefit of everyone who is willing to put his or her trust in Jesus. This concept is fully worked out by Paul:

> The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, [24] but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. [25] He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification (4:23-25).

The "one faith" that unites is: "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification." The "one faith" is an accomplishment of God. Many do not allow the Gospel to be what it is by substituting their own works and their own accomplishments in the hope of eternal life. When we assert justification by works and not by and through the finished work of Christ upon Calvary, then we proclaim another Gospel. As we peruse the Book of Galatians (AD 48/49), we also discover that this book too is devoted exclusively to the same theme. Some Judaizers had sought to undermine the "one faith" by denying that justification is by faith in the completed work of Christ upon the Cross.

Thus, he goes right to the core of the problem: "You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace" (Galatians 5:4). The act that reconciles us to God is not our own act, but rather it is the act of God that brings us together to Himself. Paul, in the Book of Galatians, confronts the issue of justification face-to-face with the adversaries. The question about justification is: is it by works or through faith? He sets forth the dilemma in the beginning of this epistle:

> I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—[7] which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. [8] But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! [9] As we have already said, so now I say again: **If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted**, let him be eternally condemned! (Galatians 1:6-9)

If we have not read the Book of Galatians recently, we should reread this book to see what the "one faith" is all about. In Chapter 2, Paul discusses his confrontation with Peter and accuses him and the others of "not acting in line with the **truth of the gospel**" (2:14). After analyzing the problems, he writes down: "I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!" (2:21). Over again, Paul expands his arguments about the makeup of the Gospel. In this enlargement of the Good News, he adds:

> Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." [7] Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. [8] **The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham**: "All nations will be blessed through you." [9] So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. (3:6-9)

Paul says that almost two thousand years earlier that the Gospel was preached to Abraham. The word *Gospel* is frequently identified with one's brand of theological beliefs, not as Good News about God's way of justification by grace through faith in Jesus. If we accept the traditional interpretation of Galatians 1:6-9, we wonder if God preached to Abraham the sinfulness of Instrumental music, the sinfulness of individual cups, the sinfulness of Sunday school, the sinfulness of Bible colleges, and so on. Whatever the Gospel is, this Gospel was proclaimed to Abraham. As we continue to read the third chapter of Galatians, we at once see that Paul identifies this Gospel as Jesus:

Brothers, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. [16]The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ. (3:15-16)

The "Gospel" and the "one faith" are equivalent terms that describe the same person. This Gospel of justification is equivalent to the "word of faith" that Paul makes known to the Romans (Romans 10:8), which is also equivalent to the "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5. The "word of faith" refers to what he writes in Romans 10:6-11:

But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) [7]"or 'Who will descend into the deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). [8] But what does it say? "**The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming:** [9]That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. [10]For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. [11]As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

Paul contrasts the "word of faith" with the works of the Law. The "word of faith" is Jesus. With the heart we believe in Jesus. We who believe in Jesus are justified. This Jesus is the "one faith" that can bring together the people of God. This "word of faith" is not, as stated above, a compendium of theology put forth by various offshoots within the fragmented body of Christ. All over again, one might say that this "one faith" is: "God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement" (10:5). This sacrifice of Christ is the very heart of the Gospel. In the Corinthian Epistle, Paul captures the real meaning of the "one faith," when he pens:

God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. [20]We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. [21]God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:19-21)

This verse (19) gives the central part of the Gospel—reconciliation with God through Jesus. The KJV renders verse 19: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not **imputing** their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation." The word *impute* means to put down to someone's account. God, says Paul, has taken our sins and has imputed them to Christ. God has punished our sins in Him: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (5:21). Christ bore the punishment that we deserve. Peter reports the sacrifice of Christ this way: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed" (1 Peter 2:24).

God did not stop with imputing our sins to Jesus, but He also imputed (credited) His righteousness to us who put our trust in Jesus for salvation. We can say with great joy: "our **unrighteousness** was put on Him, but, on the other hand, His righteousness was put on us." Paul elaborates on this kind of righteousness in his discussion of Abraham. He says, "But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; [25]Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Romans 4:24-24, KJV). Paul also cites the words of David (1010-970 BC, reigned), who wrote approximately 1000 years after Abraham, concerning imputation:

What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? [2]For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath *whereof* to glory; but not before God. [3]For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it **was counted unto him for righteousness**. [4]Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. [5]But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. **[6]Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,** [7]*Saying*, Blessed *are* they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. [8]Blessed *is* the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin. (4:1-8, KJV).

God's method of salvation under the Old Testament was by imputation. In Ephesians, Paul is concerned about the essential principle of unity based upon God's actions in Christ Jesus. Salvation is God's action; it is all of grace; it is all God's doing from first to last. There is only one way of salvation—the way of faith. We can break this unity of faith by bringing in our own works. We can break this unity of faith by insisting that all believers submit to our own unique party of believers. When we break this unity, we deny the centrality of the "one Lord," namely, Jesus. The "one faith" is not a creedal statement that represents some identifying mark of accepted beliefs that distinguishes one Church of Christ from another Church of Christ. The "one faith" is either Jesus or else Jesus is the object of personal belief. As I bring this chapter to a close, perhaps Paul's words to Timothy in his first and second epistles would be appropriate to conclude this in-depth study:

> Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. [9] They must keep hold of the **deep truths of the faith** with a clear conscience. (1 Timothy 3:8-9)

> Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, [15] if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. [16] Beyond all question, **the mystery of godliness is great**: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory (3:14-16).

> **Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel**, [9] for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. [10] Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, **that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory**. (2 Timothy 2:8-10)

The next chapter (19) analyzes another text that should be reexamined through new eyes. One of the most popular sayings among Christians today is, "The truth will set you free." When this text is isolated from its context, then, the text can mean anything that an individual believes the Bible teaches. This skewed interpretation of John 8:32 has resulted from piece-meal interpretation. Chapter 19 explores the immediate context in order to arrive at Jesus' intended meaning. This chapter reveals that the "truth" that will set us free is none other than Jesus Himself.

19

The Truth Will Set You Free

> This assault by God upon the world is Jesus Christ. This is the meaning of revelation and atonement. He is the Divine King who thus establishes His sovereignty, and in so doing sets humanity free from the powers which are hostile to God and therefore also hostile to life.[496]

One of the best-known Scriptures within the Christian community is a statement by Jesus: "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). This Scripture is frequently employed by many sincere Christians in order to justify their separation from other Christians over what they conceive to be the "truth," that is to say, their particular brand name of prevailing attitude. The question that confronts every Christian is this: What is "the truth" that Jesus alludes to? Is this "truth" dogmatic truth? Is it right orthodoxy? Is this "truth" abstract truth? Is this "truth" simply an understanding of intellectual knowledge of facts recorded in the Bible? As we approach this well-known passage, we face the influence of previous misunderstanding in our interpretation. The abuse of this Scripture, in many instances, has fractured the Body of Christ into warring factions, each claiming to be the only ones who have a handle on the "truth" that Jesus speaks about in John 8:32. This chapter is not designed to castigate God's people for their lack of understanding, but rather the purpose of this study is to help break down the barriers that separate the ones for whom Christ died.[497]

E. D. Hirsch (b. 1928, presently, he is 92), U. S. educator and academic literary critic, enunciates a basic principle of interpretation that we must apply in the interpretation of any text: "Meaning is that which is represented by a text."[498] Hirsch is simply saying that the meaning of any wording is the author's meaning, not the interpreter's. Today, we should reject the traditional interpretation of John 8:32 because it is wrong. This "truth" is not one's party slant. It is Jesus! Whenever an interpreter discards the meaning of the author, the interpreter takes over the place of the author—this leads to confusion and division among God's people. When we begin with a faulty foundation (conception or impression) about what the text is saying, we are able to find all our viewpoints. After we throw out the context, we are without a guidepost to steer us in an accurate awareness of the author's intent.

As soon as we come within reach of John 8:32, we must not move toward this text with strong subjective biases. In our advance toward this Scripture, we must not isolate this text from its context. It is not uncommon for Christians to view the Bible as a series of unrelated verses. It is not exceptional for God's

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[496]Emil Brunner, *The Mediator: A Study of the Central Doctrine of the Christian Faith* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1934, 1952), 553.

[497]This essay is rather lengthy, but this drawn-out discussion is necessary in order to lead individuals into the true meaning of the text. When we try to eliminate traditions, we must go to great lengths in order to unfold the author's intent. For this reason, I have taken a great deal of space to analyze the first seven chapters of the Gospel of John in order to nail down the meaning we should attach to Jesus' words about "the truth shall set you free."

[498]E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University press, 1967), 8.

children to habitually proof-text Scriptures in order to give validity to their doctrinal beliefs. Cedric B. Johnson is correct when he writes: "'A proof-texting' approach is a poor way to discover the meaning of Scriptures."[499] This kind of theology is hollow and empty. People want to hear again about the saving revelation of God as revealed in His Holy Word—Jesus Christ, the mediator of the divine covenant of grace. In many fellowships, we witness the "paper pope" (religious journals—not all, but some). In this system of orthodoxy, we observe that, for many, faith is commonly identified with the traditions of the church—both faith and traditions become identical.

Leroy Garrett (1918-2015), as early as 1976, called attention to the abuse of this passage. He briefly comments on this penetrating passage, along with many others, in order to bring individuals back to the true intent of Jesus' words. Listen to Garrett's insightful words as he seeks to unfold the original intent:

> Also in my file is a tearsheet from one of our papers on *what is truth?* It reminds one of how terribly we have abused this term, applying it, for the most part to our particular party slant. You are loyal to "the truth" if you are acappella or amillennial or noncooperative—or faithful to what the Christian Church or Church of Christ teaches. There are of course many truths in Scripture, and we must be faithful to all of them that we understand. Some of these are obviously more important than others. But "the truth" is something else, and I can't believe that when Jesus said "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" that he was referring to all the truths of revelation. He was referring to his own entrance into history and into the lives of his disciples. He and only he is the truth. When one knows that truth, when he knows Jesus, he is free, not until. It doesn't matter how full his head may be of the many truths of Scripture or how faithfully he interprets all the doctrine. If his heart is empty of the truth, which is the Person of Jesus dwelling in our hearts through faith, then all else is vain.[500]

Garrett strips away all extraneous matter when he writes: "He was referring to his own entrance into history and into the lives of his disciples. He and only he is the truth." Did Garrett just decide the meaning of "the truth" subjectively or did he examine the context objectively? A word of caution is in order when anyone approaches God's Word. As stated above, we should never proof-text as our method of interpretation. It is not sufficient to just quote a passage; we must consider its historical context. Since the Word comes to us in the form of a past context, we should examine the Scriptures before and after the text under examination in order to draw from the Scriptures what God says to His people. John 8:32 is frequently limited by the predetermined interpretive grid (brand of orthodoxy/party slant). Just a perusal of many Church of Christ journals reveals that the various factions within the Churches of Christ lay claim to this Scripture as their own. As a result of this mindset, many saints confuse their view of Scripture with their own interpretation—an interpretation that is identified as "the truth." From this kind of reasoning, if we disagree, we are then described as *unsound*.

Before I analyze the context for John 8:32, perhaps it would be helpful to call attention to the fact that I grew up in a fellowship in which this passage was cited to justify separation from every believer that dared to disagree with the status quo of my particular fellowship.[501] As a young man, I was associated with the one-cup and non-Sunday school fellowship. I cited this passage to prove that if one wanted freedom then one had to give up individual cups, Sunday school, instrumental music, wine in the Lord's Supper, breaking of the bread,[502] and

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[499]Cedric B. Johnson, *The Psychology of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 27.

[500]Leroy Garrett, "Some of the Left over Passages," *Restoration Review* 18, no. 10 (December 1976): 283.

[501]Even though I am calling attention to the abuse of this Scripture in my earlier traditions, I still must say that the ones who taught me were sincere and godly men. Many of these preachers are now with the Lord; they have crossed the great gulf between God and humanity. I have been extremely fortunate to have been exposed to the science of interpretation. As a result of having been exposed to the science of interpretation, I have been able to avoid the many pitfalls of the forefathers in the Stone/Campbell Movement. It goes, almost without saying, that perfect understanding of God's Holy Word is not essential to salvation. But what God is concerned about is whether one loves Him. Listen to Paul as he seeks to draw attention to what it is all about:

> Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. [2] The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. [3] But the man who loves God is known by God. (1 Corinthians 8:1-3)

[502]This particular group "pinches" the bread rather than "breaks" the bread. If one broke the bread, one broke the bones of Jesus and violated the Scripture that states that not a bone of Him shall be broken.

so on. In the prevailing attitude of this fellowship, Christians did not recognize the distinction between the Word of God and their traditions (doctrine), which is also true of many other Churches of Christ outside this small group of believers. One of the basic errors of this sincere fellowship consisted in an overvaluation of doctrine of the church rather than proclamation of Jesus and Him crucified. This fellowship confused the proclamation of the Good News with their brand of accepted beliefs.

As we examine the preaching of the Apostles, we discover that the missionary proclamation of the Apostles has only a distant relationship to what takes place in the pulpit of many churches today. What takes place in countless churches today has very little to do with what the Bible calls "proclaiming the Word." Just recently, I read a chapter in a book on missionary activities—yet to be published—in which the author stressed the sinfulness of handclapping in the assembly, contemporary singing in the congregation, instrumental music in congregational singing,[503] preachers preaching from the floor in order to be closer to the congregation, women participating in the assembly, and so on.[504] Ultimately, this dear brother concludes that anyone who is not in his camp on these issues is in the camp of the post-modernist. It is not uncommon for Christians of this mindset to cite John 8:32 to give credence to their position of the nature of "truth." Those who wish to discard the false identification of doctrine with the Word of God—the Gospel of God—are castigated with the anathema of "post-modernist" or "digressive" or "unsound" in THE FAITH.

Countless churches no longer understand themselves as missionary churches. The churches, as a whole, have put so much emphasis upon right doctrine that they have ceased to emphasize discipleship. Within many fellowships, especially within some Churches of Christ, so much emphasis is placed upon the "true church" or the "Lord's church"[505] that the true purpose of the Christian community has been lost—proclamation of God's Way of salvation in and through Jesus Christ—who is "the Truth" that sets one free (John 8:32). Just a casual reading of the Sermons in the Book of Acts reveals the distinction between the preaching of the Apostles and the preaching of the modern day church, especially within some of the twenty-five or more divisions within the Churches of Christ. It is in this vein that Emil Brunner (1889-1966, Swiss theologian, says,

> The truth of which the Bible speaks is always a happening, and indeed the happening of the meeting between God and man, an act of God which must be received by an act of man. The truth acting—this is the characteristic unphilosophical, non-Greek way in which the Bible speaks of truth. In the measure that this understanding of truth again becomes alive in it, the Church will itself be renewed again into the true Church. For this renascence we are hoping.[506]

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE FIRST SEVEN CHAPTERS IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

If we are to interpret John 8:32 correctly, we must treat this text within its full unit of meaning. The safest way for us to be sure that the Scriptures support our own position is to ignore the context. In order for us

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[503]For an examination of the subject of instrumental music in the Christian assembly, see Dallas Burdette, "God Is A Lover of Music" in *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2008), 236-248.

[504]The items listed above are issues surrounding the so-called worship service associated with five rituals to be performed on Sunday morning in a prescribed way. The Bible does not call the assembly a worship service; this concept has come out of Roman Catholicism. For essays dealing with the current problems within the Churches of Christ over "worship," See Dallas Burdette, "The Coming of God's Kingdom: A Call to Worship," "True Worship," "Congregational Worship and Division," "Sunday Morning Worship—Five Acts," Worship: An Analysis of the Various Greek Words," and "Biblical Worship" [ONLINE]. Available from www.freedominchrist.net [accessed September 29, 2008] located under caption the SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under WORSHIP.

[505]The unique expression ("the Lord's Church") is employed by many within the Churches of Christ to distinguish themselves from the so-called denominational world. In other words, no one is a member of the Lord's Church who is not a part of the Churches of Christ. It goes almost without saying that the denominational Church of Christ did not exist when Luther (1483-1546) nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of Schlosskirche in 1517, nor did the Church of Christ exist when Pope Urban II (AD 1042-1099) led the first Christian crusade (AD 1095-1099) in 1095. The church of Christ was in existence, but not the Church of Christ Church that came out of the Stone/Campbell Movement.

[506]Emil Brunner, *The Divine-Human Encounter* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1943), 210-202.

to understand the meaning of Jesus' words in John 8:32, we must unpack the background leading up to the text in question. John begins his Gospel with the identity of this One who is called Jesus:

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2]He was with God in the beginning. [3] Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. [4] In him was life, and that life was the light of men. [5]The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood[a] it. (John 1:1-5)

In these four verses, John goes right to the heart of the One who will set one free. This One is none other than the One whom John writes: "The **Word became flesh** and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only,[d] who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (1:14). This verse reveals that Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. In other words, Jesus is the centerpiece of history: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. [7] If you really knew me, you would know[a] my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him" (John 14:6). Jesus is the single way to God. It is only in Jesus Christ that we find freedom from God's wrath. For us to deny this message about Jesus, while, at the same time, pursuing spirituality, we simply conjure up an imaginary religion—one that is fatal. Only the Son of God can make us free.

The Prologue to John reveals that the message about Christ is not just an introduction to a religion, but rather it is an **introduction to the truth** about the reality of God and His love for humanity. Following the Prologue, John zeros in on the ministry of John the Baptist (1:19-28). In this pericope (unit of Scripture), John the Baptist denies that he himself is "the Christ" (1:20). After this encounter, John sees Jesus coming and exclaims: "Look, the **Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world**" (1:29)! The day following this confession of John, John again calls attention to Jesus as the Lamb of God (1:36). Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, heard John speak and immediately found Peter and told him that he had found "the Messiah (that is, the Christ)" (1:40-42). The next day, Philip also found Nathanael and told him about the Messiah (1:43-51). After this meeting with Jesus, Nathanael confessed: "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel" (1:49).

In Chapter 2 of the Gospel of John, John writes about Jesus changing water into wine (2:1-11) and about His clearing the Temple of those making merchandise of God's holy place (2:12-25). In this pericope (Jesus Clears the Temple), Jesus encounters rejection by the Jews. In spite of this negative response by the Jews, Jesus still performed many miracles while in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast (2:23). Many came to the conclusion that Jesus is the answer to man's slavery to sin—"many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name" (2:23). Chapter 3 opens with Nicodemus coming to Jesus (3:1-2). During his conversation with Jesus, Jesus tells Nicodemus that

> God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,[f] that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. [17] For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. [18]Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.[g] [19] This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. [20] Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. [21] But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.[h] (3:16-21).

Surely, John 3:16-21 is a commentary on John 8:31-32 and 8:36-37:

If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. [32]Then you will	So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. [37]I know you are

a Or *darkness, and the darkness has not overcome*
d Or the Only Begotten
a Some early manuscripts If you really have known me, you will know
f Or *his only begotten Son*
g Or *God's only begotten Son*
h Some interpreters end the quotation after verse 15.

know the truth, and the truth will set you free. (8:31-32)

Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word. (8:36-37)

If we refuse this teaching—Jesus came from God to save the world—we will perish. Freedom from condemnation can only be found in our acceptance of Jesus as the Son of God, the Savior of the world. Again, after this conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, John gives John the Baptist' testimony about Jesus (3:22-36). In this testimony John goes right to the heart of Jesus' teaching:

> The **one who comes from above** is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. [32] **He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony**. [33] The man who has accepted it has certified that God is truthful. [34] For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God[c] gives the Spirit without limit. [35] The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. [36] **Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him**.[d] (3:31-36)

If we reject this teaching that Jesus is "The one who comes from above," then we will perish "for God's wrath remains on him." It is only the Son of God who can set us free from the wrath of God. In the very next chapter, we observe that the Samaritan woman believed this testimony (4:1-26). Not only did she believe this teaching—"I who speak to you am he" (1:28)—but many of the Samaritans also believed that Jesus was the Messiah (4:39-42). In Chapter 5, Jesus heals a man who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years (5:1-15). As a result of this healing on the Sabbath, the Jews sought to persecute Jesus. The Jews reasoned that since He forgave sins, this statement made Jesus equal with God (5:18). Again, Jesus explains His teachings about His relationship to the Father:

> I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. [20] For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these. [21] For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. [22] Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, [23] that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him. (5:19-23)

If we refuse to accept and abide in this teaching, God's wrath abides upon us. Once more, Jesus strips away all the underbrush and goes right to the heart of eternal salvation: "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life" (5:24). As we turn to chapter six, John reveals that Jesus fed five thousand with just "five small barley loaves and two small fish" (6:1-8). Those who witnessed this miracle exclaimed: "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world" (6:14). Following Jesus' walking on water (6:16-24), the crowd found Him on the other side of the lake (6:25). Jesus reflects upon the earlier miracle of feeding the five thousand and refers to Himself as "the bread of life" (6:35). In the flow of the conversation with Jesus, they inquired: "What must we do to do the works God requires" (6:28). Jesus responds with piercing words about His identity: "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent" (6:29).

If we wish to know what the teaching is that Jesus speaks of in 8:31, we should reflect once more on Jesus' words to the crowd that He had previously fed. Listen to the words of Jesus as He seeks to call attention to Himself in the scheme of redemption:

> I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. [36] But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. [37] All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. [38] For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. [39] And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise

c Greek *he*

d Some interpreters end the quotation after verse 30.

them up at the last day. [40] For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. (6:35-40)

If one "looks to the Son and believes in him," that one "shall have eternal life." It is only in the Son of God that we find freedom from God's wrath. In Chapter 6, we also read about the desertion of many of His disciples, individuals who rejected His teachings about Himself (6:53-66). In Chapter 7, John records that Jesus went to the Feast of the Tabernacles (7:1-13). While at this Feast, Jesus teaches (7:14-24). About halfway through the Feast, Jesus goes into the temple courts and begins to teach (7:14). As result of His teachings, "The Jews were amazed and asked, 'How did this man get such learning without having studied'" (7:15). In reaction to their question, Jesus responded by saying:

My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. [17] If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. [18] He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him. [19] Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me? (7:16-19)

Many Jews rejected this teaching about Jesus' Deity. They rejected Him as the One that the Prophets foretold would come to take away the sins of the world. John focuses once more on the identity of Jesus by reporting the reaction of the people to Jesus:

At that point some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill? [26] Here he is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to him. Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Christ[a]? [27] But we know where this man is from; when the Christ comes, no one will know where he is from." (7:25-27)

Is Jesus the Christ? Some said "yes," but others said "no." Following this conversation in 7:25-27, John, once more, calls attention to Jesus' teaching. Pay attention to the words of Jesus as He again identifies Himself: "Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from. I am not here on my own, but he who sent me is true. You do not know him, [29] but I know him because I am from him and he sent me" (7:28-29). After this encounter, each went to his own home, but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives (8:1). When dawn came, Jesus, once more, went to the temple courts where the people gathered around him and He taught them (8:2). In this teaching, Jesus says, "I am the light of the world, Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (8:12).

The Pharisees challenged this teaching (8:13), but Jesus did not for one moment shrink back from this teaching. He plowed ahead, as it were, with the truth of His teachings:

Even if I testify on my own behalf, **my testimony** is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going. [15] You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. [16] But if I do judge, my decisions are right, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. [17]In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two men is valid. [18] I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me. (8:14-18)

The Pharisees rejected this teaching, but Jesus continued to drive home the point that without belief in Him, one could not be free. Jesus says, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. [24] I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be,[a] you will indeed die in your sins" (8:23-24). In spite of this rejection by the religious leaders, nevertheless, there were Jews who believed His teachings about His having come from the Father to give eternal life to those who believe in Him (8:31). Listen to Jesus as He says, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. [32]

a Or *Messiah*; also in verses 27, 31, 41 and 42
a Or *I am he*; also in verse 28

Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (8:31-32). Then Jesus drops the bombshell on His listeners:

> I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. [35] Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. [36] So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. [37] I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word. [38] I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you do what you have heard from your father.[b] (8:34-38)

THE "I AM" STATEMENTS

With the above examination of the first seven chapters in John leading up to 8:32, this focus should assist us in understanding the "I AM" statement as a reference point in approaching John 8:32. The preceding discussion about Jesus' statements concerning Himself is necessary in order to fully grasp the significance of this now famous verse (8:32). The "I am" statements in the Gospel of John should enhance our understanding of what Jesus really meant by "the truth will make you free." Only in the Gospel of John do we discover the startling "I am" statements. John records seven great "I am" (**ἐγὼ εἰμί**, *egō eimi*) announcements of Jesus (6:35; 9:5; 10:7; 10:11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1).

Each of the "I am" sayings is followed with a predicate nominative—"the light of the world," and so on. These "I am" declarations indicate that one is dealing with someone who is deity. In addition to these seven assertions, we also read of three statements in the eighth chapter of the Gospel of John (8:24, 28, 58) that sets forth in clear terms that Jesus is the One that the prophets foretold would come into the world to save sinners—"I am He." The pronoun "He" is added as a predicate nominative, even thought the I AM sayings in vv. 24, 28, and 58 are absolute—no predicate. These statements by Jesus unfold something of the greatness of this One that is called "the Christ" (**ὁ Χριστός**, *ho Christos*). He identifies Himself as the Messiah (**Μεσσίας**, *Messias*), the savior of the world (1:29-30). Having said this, Jesus, in this very statement (**ἐγὼ εἰμί**, *egō eimi*), discloses the truth of His Person—deity.

John does not argue the point of Christ's Deity as he begins his Gospel. He simply states that Christ "was with (**πρός**, *pros,* literally, facing God) God in the beginning" and that Christ "was God" [**θεός ἦν ὁ λόγος**, *theos ēn ho logos*] (John 1:1-2). After stressing the Deity of Christ in the Prologue (1:1-18), he gives evidence to substantiate his bold assertions about who Christ is as well as His preexistence (1:14-18). John the Baptist said, "He was before (**ἔμπροσθεν**, *emprosthen*) me" (1:15). John had a beginning in time, but there has never been a time in which Jesus never existed. In fact, He created time. John proves Jesus' Deity by calling attention to the miraculous in Jesus' ministry, and, at the same time, John gives the personal testimony of Jesus to substantiate His preexistence in order to prove that Jesus existed prior to the creation of this universe. Thus, from this testimony, John declares: "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (1:3).

This language of John is similar to the language of Paul to the Christians at Colossae. In this short epistle, Paul, too, speaks of the creation as a work of Christ: "For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; **all things were created by him** and for him. [17] **He is before all things** (**πρὸ πάντων**, *pro pantōn*), and in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:16-17). John also records a prayer of Jesus—a prayer that occurred shortly before His trial—which is quite revealing, concerning His preexistence. In this prayer, Jesus prays: "Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you **before the world began**" (John 17:5).

The Gospel of John is loaded with information concerning the preexistence of Jesus. On one occasion, Jesus encountered some Jews who were antagonistic toward His remarks about God and Himself. In the ensuing conversation, He replied:

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b Or *presence. Therefore do what you have heard from the Father.*

If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. [55] Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and keep his word. [56] Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad. (8:54-56)

This affirmation by Jesus is amazing. Why? Well, He said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." Abraham was born in 2166 BC and died in 1991 BC; yet, Jesus speaks of Abraham as having seen the day of Christ and was glad. How could this be? Abraham lived 2000 years before the birth of Jesus. In fact, the Jews questioned Him: "You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" (8:57). Jesus' answer to their statement is quite revealing concerning His true identity. In His response to the Jews, He testifies that He existed before Abraham (8:58) and that He is the One whom Abraham saw (**ἐγὼ εἰμί**, *egō eimi*, I am he). The "I AM" statement, as observed above, is an expression of deity. The Greek text is: "Before (**πρίν**, *prin*) Abraham became (**γενέσθαι**, *genesthai*, to become) I am (**ἐγὼ εἰμί**, *egō eimi*)." The aorist verb (*genesthai*) marks a historical point in time. On the other hand, Jesus uses the present tense to indicate that before Abraham's existence He Himself existed.

With this expression (*egō eimi*), an expression that is applied to God the Father in the Old Testament, Jesus is not saying that He is identical with the Father, but rather He is claiming that this unique expression may also be used of Him. In the eighth chapter of John (vv. 24, 28), He does assert His Messiahship with this same expression. Not only did He assert his preexistence, but He also identified Himself as the One foretold by the prophets that would take away the sins of the world. Listen, once more, to Jesus as he boldly asserts: "before Abraham was born, I am! (**ἐγὼ εἰμί**, *egō eimi*)" (8:58). Abraham's time was time-bound. On the other hand, Jesus is not time-bound. With the "I AM" expression, Jesus points to His existence with God beyond the bounds of time.[507] George Beasley-Murray (1916-1980), professor of New Testament from 1973-1980, expresses the significance of the **ἐγὼ εἰμί**, (*egō eimi)* saying this way: '"Before Abraham came into existence I am' expresses 'the contrast between the existence initiated by birth and an absolute existence.'"[508]

The three occurrences of the "I AM" sayings (absolute) in chapter eight is found in the absolute, no predicate attached.[509] This confession (8:58) is the third of the "I am" (**ἐγὼ εἰμί**, *egō eimi*) statements in the eighth chapter of John. Did the Jews understand Jesus' declaration that He was the One to come as predicted by the prophets? Did they comprehend this unique expression to refer to deity? Yes, they did! They understood His words, but they did not believe His words. John records their swift reaction to these words: "At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds" (8:59). The Jews refused to hold/accept the teaching of Jesus about His identity (8:31).

JESUS IS THE TRUTH

As we examine the Christian faith, we can say that the Christian faith is faith in Jesus as "the truth." For us to say that Jesus is the content of truth is a radical departure from the ordinary concept of truth. In the Prologue to the Gospel of John, John writes: "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). With Jesus, truth came into being. Truth is something that happens; in other words, it is something God does. It is in Jesus that grace and truth reaches its pinnacle—grace and truth come to realization. In our reflection upon the Incarnation, we understand that this supernatural birth is not the pivotal point of the biblical Revelation, but rather the work of the redeemer that results in salvation for sinful humanity.

The Gospel of John guides us in understanding the "mystery of God," which is Jesus Christ (See also Colossians 1:27—2:2). The Person of the Mediator must be understood as an act of God—an act designed to set men and women free from condemnation (See also Romans 5:1-2; 8:1). In the Gospel, we observe that God reveals Himself in Jesus—"the Truth." God also reconciles the world unto Himself in Jesus—"the Truth." It is

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[507]See Gail R. O'Day, *The Gospel of John* in Leander E. Keck, ed., *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 646. I am indebted to her insights for her discussion of the predicate added by translators to the absolute **ἐγὼ εἰμί**.

[508]George R. Beasley-Murray, *John* in *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol., 36 (Waco: Texas: Work Books, 1987), 139.

[509]In 8:18, there is an **ἐγὼ εἰμί** statement, but this **ἐγὼ εἰμί** is not absolute; it has a predicate attached to it—"who testifies for myself."

in Him that God redeems humanity (See also 2 Corinthians 5:17-19). Jesus is God's act of Atonement for sinful humanity. It is in and through His Son that God gives freedom. It is in and through His Son that God gives Himself. Again, we can say that the sufferings of Christ—His passion—is the act of God in which He gives Himself and establishes fellowship with both men and women. Is it any wonder that Jesus went to the very heart of redemption when He startled His disciples with the following words:

> You are from below; **I am from above**. You are of this world; I am not of this world. [24] **I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be**,[a] you will indeed die in your sins. (John 8:23-24)

Jesus identifies Himself as the One who came forth from the Father. Some rejected this truth and therefore condemned themselves (8:42). In contrast, there were some who put their faith in Him. Thus, Jesus said to the Jews who believed that He came from the Father and that He was the Christ: "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. [32] Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (8:31-32). What truth (teaching) would they know? The Jews would know that Jesus is the One whom Abraham saw. They would know the truth that Jesus is the Son of Man. They would know the truth that He is God. They would know the truth (teaching) that Jesus is the One whom God sent into the world. They would know that He is from above. That is to say, they would know that Jesus is the One He claimed to be. The word *truth* in verse 32 is the same as the word *Son* in verse 36. The following chart in parallel columns illustrates graphically this truth:

John 8:31-32	John 8:36-37
To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. [32] Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."	So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. [37] I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word.

Gail R. O'Day writes: "The truth is the presence of God in Jesus."[510] Again, she writes: "It shows a complete misunderstanding of the egw eimi saying. They think Jesus has merely omitted the predicate in an identification saying and grasp none of the theological overtones."[511] See the following chart for a comparison of the three ἐγὼ εἰμί, egw eimi, sayings in John 8. We will observe, in all three verses, that we only find the egw eimi sayings in the absolute, even though the NIV adds a predicate—"the one I claim to be" in two (vv. 24 and 28) of the three citations:

John 8:24	John 8:28	John 8:58
I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be (ἐγὼ εἰμί), you will indeed die in your sins.	When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be (ἐγὼ εἰμί) and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.	"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" (ἐγὼ εἰμί)

a Or *I am he*; also in verse 28

[510]Gail R. O'Day, *The Gospel of John*., 637.

[511]Ibid., 634.

Again, in John (Chapter 8) there are four occurrences of the "I AM" (*egō eimi*) sayings; all except one are expressed in the absolute, no predicate given. This absolute saying is difficult to reproduce in English.[512] There are possibly three meanings that one could assign to this unique expression: (**1**) I am what I say I am—the light of the world, (**2**) I am He—the promised Messiah, and (**3**) I am—absolutely, the divine name. Even though all three ideas are present, nevertheless none are actually indicated. To those who refused to acknowledge this truth found in the *egō eimi* saying, Jesus said: "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. [24] I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that **I am** the one I claim to be (**ἐγὼ εἰμί**, *egō eimi*), you will indeed die in your sins" (8:23-24).

To return again to the "I AM" statement in 8:28, Jesus had just called to their attention a point in the future when many would acknowledge His claim to be from above and the One whom Abraham saw. John records the following words for his readers and for us:

> When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be (ἐγὼ εἰμί, egw eimi) and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. [29] The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him. (8:28-29).

The occurrence of the "I AM" in 8:28 is, as stated above, absolute, no predicate supplied. The NIV does supply a predicate by translating this as: "I am **the one I claim to be**." The NRSV supplies a pronoun as a predicate nominative ("I am **he**"). Even though these translations may be accurate according to the context, still one must remember that by adding the predicate, one alters the absolute ἐγὼ εἰμί, egw eimi. Jesus identifies Himself with the divine name.[513] We can hardly read this prediction (8:28) of Jesus without reflection upon the Roman Centurion who stood at the foot of the Cross. Mark gives the following reaction of this Centurion: "And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, 'Surely this man was the Son of God!'" (Mark 15:39).

Generally, the "I am" (**ἐγὼ εἰμί**, *egō eimi*) saying in John 8:58 is associated with Exodus 3:14, and there is validity to this assumption. God said to Moses: "I AM WHO I AM (**Ἐγὼ εἰμί ὁ ὤν**, *Egō eimi ho ō*). This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" (3:14). The *egō eimi* is an Old Testament formula. The phrase is equivalent to "I am the Lord."[514] The **ἐγὼ εἰμί** in the Septuagint (LXX) renders the Hebrew אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה[515] (ʾĕ·hᵉyĕ(h)ʼ ʾăšĕrʼ ʾĕ·hᵉyĕ(h)ʼ), which is the way God speaks (see Deuteronomy 32:39; Isaiah 41:4; 43:10; 46:4). The Hebrew may carry a reference to the divine name יהוה (*yhwh*).[516]

This absolute occurs in several passages in the Gospel of John—4:26; 6:20; 8: 24, 28, 58; 13:9; 18:5, 6, 8. Perhaps, there is some justification for adding the predicate since the controversy was over whether or not Jesus is the Christ (7:25-44). But having said this, we must never forget that the egw eimi is absolute in the above references, even though sometimes, in other citations, one does observe the predicate, for example, John 6:35—"I am the bread of life." This essay does not deal with 8:18, since this expression does not occur in the sections of controversy over who Jesus is.

Earlier, Jesus, in His conversation with the Samaritan woman, used this same phrase—"I am he" (**ἐγὼ εἰμί**, *egō eimi*). In the course of this encounter, the woman responded to a statement of Jesus by saying: "I know that Messiah (called Christ) is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us" (4:25). In response to this statement about the Messiah, Jesus responded by saying: "I who speak to you am he (**ἐγὼ εἰμί**, *egō eimi*)" (4:26). Jesus states emphatically that He is the One that she and others were looking to come. Pay attention to 4:26 once more: "Jesus says to her: 'I am (**ἐγὼ εἰμί**, *egō eimi*, "I am he") the one speaking to you'" (my

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[512]See Leon Morris (1914-2006), *The Gospel According to John*, Revised, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 397.

[513]O' Day, *The Gospel of John*, 634.

[514]See Beasley-Murray, *John*, 130.

[515] *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia: With Westminster Hebrew Morphology.*, electronic ed. (Stuttgart; Glenside PA: German Bible Society; Westminster Seminary, 1996), Ex 3:14.

[516]See Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 420.

translation—RDB). The "I am" statement in John 4:26 is equivalent to the three identical phrases found in John chapter eight (vv. 23, 28, 58).

In the seventh chapter of John, Jesus emphasizes His origin and His mission. At the Feast of Booths (Tabernacles), Jesus began to teach. As a result of this teaching, "The Jews were amazed and asked, 'How did this man get such learning without having studied?'" (7:15). Whereupon Jesus responds by saying: "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me" (7:16). Following His discourse, some asked the question concerning His identity. John records the following response from the people as to whether or not He really is the Christ:

> At that point some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill? [26] Here he is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to him. Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Christ? [27] But we know where this man is from; when the Christ comes, no one will know where he is from." (7:25-26)

On the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles (Booths), Jesus stood and said in a loud voice: "If anyone is thirsty, let him **come to me** and drink. [38] Whoever **believes in me**, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him" (7:37-38). Again, almost immediately, the people said, '"Surely this man is the Prophet.' Others said, 'He is the Christ.'" In Chapter 8 of John's Gospel, Jesus gives testimony as to His preexistence and to His being the Christ whom God sent. Three times in this chapter, Jesus uses the expression: ἐγὼ εἰμί, egw eimi (8:24, 28, 58) in the absolute. The salvation of the Jews depended upon their acceptance of Jesus as the Christ, the savior of the world. Pay attention to Jesus as He issues His warning against the Jews: "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. [24] I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am (**ἐγὼ εἰμί**, *egō eimi*) **the one I claim to be**, you will indeed die in your sins" (8:23-24). The Jews demanded to know "Who are you?" (8:25). Thus, the translators provided the predicate for the "I am" in order to complete the sense of Jesus' response.

The NIV added the words, "*the one I claim to be*." This translation captures the essence of verse 24. Unless they accepted the fact that Jesus is the One He claimed to be, they would die in their sins. Repetition is unavoidable in this study. It is necessary to call to mind certain Scriptures over and over again in order to draw attention to the significance of John 8:58. Our salvation hinges upon our acceptance of Jesus as the One the prophets spoke of. Still, many Jews did not understand, so Jesus again explains His relationship with the Father:

> When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am (**ἐγὼ εἰμί**, *egō eimi*) the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. [29] The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him. (8:28-29)

Once more the NIV translators, in order to make clear the sense of the passage, added the words, "*the one I claim to be*." As a result of the words of Jesus, John says, "many put their faith in him" (8:30). Then to the Jews who believed, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. [32] Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (8:31-32). What truth would make them free? If they accepted the truth that Jesus had **come from the Father** and that He was **the Christ**, then they would not die in their sins. In other words, if they accepted that Jesus is the One He claimed to be, then they could have eternal life—acceptance of this truth would set them free.

We must accept this teaching if we wish eternal life. Jesus went on to say: "So, if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (8:36). Many of the Jews just refused to accept Jesus. In fact, some cried out: "Abraham is our father" (8:39). Jesus responds to their statement by saying:

> "If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "**then you would do the things Abraham did**. [40] As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. [41] You are doing the things your own father does." (8:39-41a)

How did Abraham react to the announcement concerning the coming of the Messiah? He rejoiced and was glad. On the other hand, the Jews sought to kill Jesus. Thus, the Jews who refused to believe were of their father, the devil. In response to their negative reaction as to His claims, Jesus said to them:

> If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me. [43] Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. [44] You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. [45] Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! [46] Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? [47] He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God. (8:42-47)

CONCLUSION

Many did not even know their own Messiah as He stood before them. Certainly, Abraham saw the birth of the Messiah. More conversation follows these remarks in 8:42-47. Jesus zeros in on Abraham's faith. He told the Jews: "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (8:56). They were dumbfounded by this comment. They questioned Him by saying: "You are not yet fifty years old, and you have seen Abraham!" (8:57). Then Jesus issued a statement that cemented His claim about being the Messiah sent forth from God: "I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, I am" [**ἐγὼ εἰμί**, *egō eimi*] (8:58). **ἐγὼ εἰμί**, *egō eimi* = "I exist." Yes, Jesus identifies Himself as the Messiah by saying: "I am he" (*egō eimi*, vv. 24, 28). Jesus is saying, in effect, that I am the One that "Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (8:56). Emil Brunner (1889-1966), an eminent and highly influential Swiss Protestant (Reformed) theologian, captures the essence of the coming of Jesus in his remarks in his book, *The Mediator*:

> The assault of God upon the world is Jesus Christ. This is the meaning of revelation and atonement. He is the Divine King who thus establishes His sovereignty, and is so doing sets humanity free from the powers which are hostile to God and therefore also hostile to life.[517]

In John 8:24, 28, and 58, Jesus is simply saying, "I am he" (**ἐγὼ εἰμί**, *egō eimi*). In other words, I am the One whom Abraham saw. Jesus not only proclaimed His preexistence, but He also proclaimed Himself as the One whom Abraham foresaw. Is it any wonder that Jesus said that if you do not believe that "I am he," you will die in your sins? Have you accepted this One who is called God (John 1:1)? Have we accepted this One who created all things (1:2)? Have we received the One who turned water into wine (2:1-11)? Have we acknowledged the One who walked on water (6:16-21)?

Have we recognized the One who raised Lazarus from the dead (11:38-44)? Have we trusted in the One who cured the eyesight of one born blind (9:1-12)? Have we accepted the One who fed 5,000 with just five small loaves and two fishes (6:1-15)? If not, why not receive Him so that you may have eternal life (8:31-32)? Do we believe that before Abraham was born that Jesus existed? Do we believe that Jesus is the "I AM" of John 8:58? If so, then we need to acknowledge this truth and become a disciple of the Messiah, the savior of the world (3:16-21). His miracles prove His assertion— **ἐγὼ εἰμί**.

> To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. [32] Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." [33] They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants[a] and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" [34] Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. [35] Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. [36] So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. [37] I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me,

[517]Emil Brunner, *The Mediator: A Study of the Central Doctrine of the Christian Faith* (1934, reprinted (London: Lutterworth Press, 1952), 553.

a Greek *seed*; also in verse 37

because you have no room for my word. [38] I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you do what you have heard from your father." [b] (8:31-38)

The next chapter (20) examines a well-known Scripture that is frequently cited by many Christians to teach that in order for there to be fellowship between the various splinter-groups within the Churches of Christ, there must be unanimity of opinion. This postulation is based upon a faulty reading of Amos' words to the nation of Israel—"Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3, KJV). This chapter explores its historical background as well as the Hebrew word for "agreed." This in-depth study is not designed to question the sincerity of those who advocate a meaning not found in the context, but rather, the objective is to help Christians understand the author's intended meaning in order for Christians to promote the unity that Jesus prayed for His people.

b Or *presence. Therefore do what you have heard from the Father.*

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Walking Together

Proof-texting is one of the most prevalent methods of giving validity to many odd interpretations found within the fellowship of many Christians. One such Scripture is Amos 3:3. This text is often employed to justify separation from other believers when there is disagreement over doctrinal interpretations concerning cherished traditions. This is just one of the many passages of Scripture that is frequently abused by many sincere, well-meaning believers.[518] This chapter seeks to examine the context of Amos 3:3 and to review the various authors who rely upon their interpretation of Amos 3:3 to uphold their actions of rejection of other Christians for refusing to conform to the status quo of a particular party line. Carl Ketcherside (1908-1989), editor and author, is perfectly right when he sets forth his caveat of the art of sermon-making by which Scriptures are tortured to maintain the status quo of splinter groups:

> The art of sermon-making, a skill wholly unknown to the new covenant scriptures, has led its practitioners far afield in their ardent pursuit of texts. When one is found which seems to suit the propaganda purpose of the hour, they operate and remove it from the contextual body, and by injections of their own intellectual distillate seek to make it develop into a new body of its own. No creation of homiletic fantasy better illustrates this than the use of Amos 3:3 by modern advocates of unity based upon conformity.[519]

KING JAMES VERSION

The King James Version renders this verse: "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (אִם־נוֹעָדוּ, ʾim-·nô·ʿā′·ḏû) unless they have **made an appointment**, Amos 3:3).[520] Surface reading appears to support the assertions by many God-fearing men and women that unless there is agreement, then there can be no

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[518]For a classic example of misapplication of Amos 3:3 in order to uphold one's sectarian spirit against other believers is found in the writings of J. A. McNutt. See his essay, "Can We Walk Together," *Firm Foundation* 102, no. 22 (September 24, 1985): 7 [567], where he writes:

> "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). . . . Where there is no agreement with the will of God, there can be no communion or fellowship with their Lord. . . . Another pertinent question at this point regarding fellowship would be, "How can we walk together with those who are not walking (or living) according to the word of God? . . . It is also clearly stated that, "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he has both the Father and the Son" (2 John 9). . . . Unity is a wonderful thing and much to be desired, but should never be sought by sacrificing God's truth, or by compromise with error.

Another example is from the late Ira Y. Rice, Jr., (1917-2001), who also advanced the same mindset and abuse of Amos 3:3 to give validity to his castigation of Christians who could not subscribe to his odd interpretations attached to many Scriptures. For this illustration, see Ira Y. Rice, Jr., CAN TWO FAITHS POSSIBLY BE ACCEPTABLE? *Contending for the Faith XXVI*, no. 8 (August 1995): 3, where he says, "The merest tyro acquainted with Amos 3:3 should be able to understand that two CANNOT walk together except they be agreed!"

[519]Carl Ketcherside, "Except They Be Agreed," *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 11 (November 1965): 162-163.

[520]*The King James Version*, (Cambridge: Cambridge) 1769.

fellowship. This Scripture is alluded to in order to substantiate almost every division within the community of the redeemed. For example, the following is a list of problems in which Christians withdraw association: the use of individual communion cups versus the common cup, the employment of wine instead of grape juice, the breaking of the loaf instead of pinching the loaf, the acceptance of the "exception rule" in Matthew 5:32 versus those who reject this particular rule as applicable to the Christian dispensation,[521] the adoption of Sunday school classes versus those who reject the employment of Sunday school as an innovation, the use of the instrument in singing versus the rejection of the instrument (acappella), the support of Bible colleges, the support of orphan homes, and so on.[522] This list is almost infinitum.

For Christians who rely on this verse to substantiate their sectarian attitudes toward other believers is based upon isolation of a text out of context. The King James rendering of the passage is misleading, especially if we fail to consult the context. When we attempt to exegete this Scripture, we must always place ourselves into the mind frame of the author and stand upon his threshold and look through his eyes. We must study with precise attention the prophet's language. Where differences of opinion have prevailed for hundreds of years, we must not allow *a priori* (made before or without examination—not supported by factual study) assumptions of what ought to be found in this verse, or what ought not to be found there.

INDOCTRINATION VERSUS HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the examination of any text, the author should be permitted to explain himself. Many interpreters are so full of ideas drawn from past traditions, so impregnated from beliefs of past ages, so indoctrinated from well-

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[521]Even though the following citations do not cite Amos 3:3, nevertheless, the mindset for such outlandish behavior is founded on Amos 3:3. When I labored (approximately seventeen years) among these believers, Amos 3:3 was cited to justify separation on many trivial issues. The following is an account of one division that should never have taken place. I was acquainted with all of the men listed (one possible exception is Glen Bray) in the following citation from Paul Nichols, *Fifty Years of Service* (Oakdale CA: Paul Nichols, 1992), 98, where he says:

> At the next annual meeting at Sulphur Oklahoma, several brethren met together. **Glen Bray**, **Fred Kirbo** [1912-1968] and **Barney Welch** [1915-1992] represented the no exception position. Edwin Morris [1922-2008], Clovis, **Don McCord** and **Ronny Wade [1936-2020)** represented the exception position—divorce for the cause of fornication. At this meeting it was pointed out to Fred that it was inconsistent for him to be out of fellowship with Edwin [Edwin Morris—1922-2008] and still fellowship those who believed as he did. So Fred withdrew from the rest of us at that time and did not fellowship us until the day he died of a heart attack while in a meeting at Warsaw, Missouri, October 26, 1968, at the age of 56 years.

Paul Nichols also cites an example of how Christians in the one-cup and non-Sunday school movement—all of equal devotion to Christ—divided over another issue known as the so-called "order of worship." Again he captures the parting of the ways by equally godly men, ibid., 90:

> Since he [**Homer A. Gay**, 1894-1958] had already taken his stand against the unauthorized practices of the class system and cups on the Lord's table, it is no wonder when he became concerned when co-editor of the *Old Paths Advocate*, Brother **J. D. Phillips** [1904-1981], began contending for an unvarying set order of worship. Brother Gay did not want to see the unity of the brotherhood disturbed. The battle for truth to gain this unity had been hard fought. He would not stand by and let it be disrupted without expressing opposition. . . . Although the division over the order of worship was extremely regrettable and the brotherhood suffered for it, something had to be done.

[522]See **Garland Elkins** (1926-2016), "Changing Attitudes Toward Fellowship," in **Bobby Liddell**, Editor, *Changes In the Church of Christ*, Nineteenth Annual Bellview Lectures, Pensacola, Florida, June 11-15, 1995 (Pensacola, FL: Austin McGary & Company, 1994), 140, where he goes right to the heart of justifying division among Christians with Amos 3:3:

> Are the faithful churches of Christ and the denominations agreed? If not, how can there be fellowship between them? Are the faithful brethren and erring brethren agreed? If not, how can there be fellowship between them? Amos wrote: "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). If they are not agreed, how can there be fellowship between them?

known preachers, and so full of desire to find what is not manifestly there that it is impossible to see the text clearly in its historical context. Cedric B. Johnson makes the following succinct observation about presuppositions:

> My contention is that conflicting theological positions are in part due to the fact that we all approach a text, sacred or secular, with our strong subjective biases. Even though we have a commitment to read the Bible on its own terms; and even though we want the Divine and human authors to speak for themselves, somehow we still come up with contradictory views on some issues. . . . Most people are familiar with the idea of "seeing" what you want to see or viewing a situation through "colored glasses." The assumption is that our perceptions of the real world can be distorted at times.[523]

James Montgomery Boice (1938-2000), pastor and articulate spokesman for the Reformed faith, correctly brings out the obvious implication of Amos 3:3 when he writes: "Amos' points are quite obvious. If people meet in order to go walking, it is by prior arrangement. If they have not agreed to meet, the walk will not take place."[524] James Luther Mays has correctly observed:

> The first seven questions range across happenings, which common experience and outlook would connect self-evidently with another event. When two men are seen making their way across the horizon of Judah's empty hill country, one knows they could hardly have met except by appointing a time and place (v.3).[525]

Hans Walter Wolff also expresses the concept by the Hebrew word that is translated "agreed" in the KJV: "יעד (yʿd) niphal (simple passive) usually means 'to make an appointment,' but later connotes 'to meet (by appointment), to assemble.'"[526] Regarding this same concept, C. F. Keil (1807-1888) writes:

> The examples are evidently selected with the view of showing that the utterances of the prophet originate with God. This is obvious enough in vers. 7, 8. The first clause, "Do two men walk together, without having agreed as to their meeting?" (נוֹעָדוּ, *nôʿāḏû*, to betake one's self to a place to meet together at an appointed place or an appointed time; compare Job ii. 11, Josh. xi. 5, Neh. vi. 2; not merely to agree together), contains something more than the trivial truth, that two persons do not take a walk together without a previous arrangement. The two who walk together are Jehovah and the prophet (Cyril); not Jehovah and the nation, to which the judgment is predicted.[527]

John H. Hayes, too, has pungently captured the essence of Amos' use of the rhetorical questions concerning the inevitability of God's judgment upon the nation of Israel with the following scenario:

> The series of questions opens in verse 3 with an interrogative statement which may be seen as a neutral or rather banal way of getting the series going. Only verse 3 is composed of a single question; the others occur in pairs. Since there are seven questions in verses 3-6, one question had to stand alone.
>
> Various translations have been proposed for verse 3, depending upon how one understands the situation envisioned in the question. The translation offered above is the one most widely found but its straightforward meaning—"Can two people walk together unless they meet?"—appears so simplistic that one wonders how it would have functioned to entice an audience's attention. The verb *hlk* can denote various forms of movement including walking. Similarly, [yʿd] ***yud*** can mean "meet" but also "designate", "appoint," in the sense of making arrangements about something (see Exod. 21:8-9). One could thus translate the verse as "Can two people go on a journey together without having made arrangements?"[528]

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[523]Cedric B. Johnson, *The Psychology of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 42.

[524]James Montgomery Boice, *Minor Prophets*, Two Volumes Complete in One Edition (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1986), 150.

[525]James Luther Mays, *Amos* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 60.

[526]Hans Walter Wolff, *A Commentary on the Books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, Hermeneia, Translated by Waldemar Janzen, S. Dean McBride, Jr., and Charles A. Muenchow, S. Dean McBride, Jr., ed (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 179.

[527]C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, 10 Volumes, originally published 1866-91 (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1996), 260.

[528]John H. Hayes, *Amos: The Eight-Century Prophet: His Times and His Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1958), 124.

For Christians to cite Amos 3:3 to justify separation from other believers who disagree with a particular brand of orthodoxy as advanced by certain groups is to abuse Amos 3:3. We must do more than just surface reading if we wish to arrive at a correct application of a particular passage. We must go "behind" the text before we go "in front" of the text. If we start "in front" for our exegetical studies, then we very well may misapply the intent of the author. Just a brief analysis reveals the intent of Amos as he proposes certain rhetorical questions in order to elicit a positive response as to the present status of Israel as she faces God's judgment.

ANALYSIS OF AMOS 3:3-8

Cause and Effect Arguments

The first question by Amos (760 BC) opens in verse three with an implied answer. The first interrogative statement may be seen as a way of initiating the series. Only verse three is composed of a single question—the travelers. On the other hand, the other verses (4-6) occur in pairs: two lions (verse 4ab), two traps (verse 5ab), and two questions to danger (verse 6ab). These analogies are presented to demonstrate the connection between the prophet's proclamation and the activity of God. In verse 3, we do not notice any element of force involved in the first question. Yet, on the other hand, the next two questions in verse 4 develop the well-known fact of a lion that overpowers another animal. The next two questions in verse 5 surrounds the hunter's vanquishing of animal prey.

The rhetorical nature of the questions renders the "cause" indisputable. Up to this point (verses 3-5), the cause is always deduced from the effect. Amos is stressing that no event is self-explanatory; there is always a cause for the effect. His adversaries denied that his appearance had anything to do with God's proclamation. Amos went, as it were, to the beginning of his prophetic ministry in order to establish the grounds for the validity of his calling by Yahweh. In a nutshell, we can say that 3:3-8 is justification for his ministry. In this section, Amos asks seven rhetorical questions and the answers to all of them were "no." Just a casual reading of the pericope (a selection of Scripture) reveals that Amos puts the effect before the cause. In other words, the cause, in these rhetorical questions, always follows the effect. We might say that for every effect there is a cause.

Seven Rhetorical Questions

This message of Amos demonstrates the **cause-and-effect** character of his ministry. The prophet puts forth a series of illustrations drawn from the world of nature to make obvious that "God cannot be mocked." Over seven hundred years after Amos' ministry, Paul, too, illustrates this same principle to the Galatians: "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows" (Galatians 6:7). Amos, through his seven rhetorical questions, proves beyond the shadow of a doubt that God's judgment is inevitable. Election carries with it responsibility. It is in this vein that Elizabeth Achtemeier (1926-2002), Adjunct Professor of Bible and Homiletics at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, captures the relevancy of Amos' penetrating questions to the Christian community today:

> That God will judge us for failing to meet the responsibilities of our election should be a sobering thought for the Christian Church, for, like Israel, we, too, have been chosen by God to be a kingdom of priest and a holy nation, that we may declare God's wonderful deeds to all the world (1 Pet. 2:9-10). Like Israel, we, too, in our redemption have been adopted as sons and daughters of God, and have been allowed to call God "Father" (Gal. 4:4-7). Because of the work of Jesus Christ, which has grafted us into the root of Israel (Rom. 11:17-24), made us citizens of Israel's commonwealth (Eph. 2:11-12), and allowed us to share the name of "the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16), we Christians can now claim to be among the elect (cf. Rom. 8:33; 2 Tim. 2:10; 2 Pet. 1:10). But as our Lord tells us in Luke 12:48, "From everyone who

has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked."[529]

Amos paints a picture that we can see—every effect has its cause and every cause has its effect. Once more, consider the following rhetorical questions:

- Do two walk together (**effect**) unless they have agreed to do so (**cause**) [3:3]?
- Does a lion roar in the thicket (**effect**) when he has no prey (**cause**)? Does he growl in his den (**effect**) when he has caught nothing (**cause**) [3:4]?
- Does a bird fall into a trap on the ground (**effect**) where no snare has been set (**cause**)? Does a trap spring up from the earth (**effect**) when there is nothing to catch (**cause**) [3:5]?
- When a trumpet sounds in a city (**cause**), do not the people tremble (**effect**)? When disaster comes to a city (**effect**), has not the LORD caused it (**cause**) [3:6]?

As we reflect upon the impact of Amos's employment of cause-and-effect arguments, perhaps a statement from Carl Ketcherside captures the force of Amos' arguments: "The divine appointment is that inevitably the sin and its punishment must meet."[530] With these illustrations, Amos presses the relationship between cause and effect. For Amos, all of the cause-and-effect arguments are self-evident truths, truths acknowledged by all. The cause-and-effect argument in Amos 3:3 is a depiction of two men walking together. His argument, so it seems, is this: The plausibility of two men walking together would not occur unless they had previously made an arrangement (appointment) to do so. Christian writer Leroy Garrett (b. 1918), author and editor, has penned some compelling words that need to be heard:

> The verse in question is the first of these cause-and-effect steps. Two men walk together (effect) because they have made an appointment—or because they have agreed to meet (cause).
>
> The point being made is that Amos, only a herdsman and farmer, is prophesying (effect) because he has a very good reason—the Lord has spoken, calling him as a prophet (cause). If one can understand that two men will not be meeting in a remote airport terminal unless they have made arrangements, then he would be able to understand that Amos would not be prophesying if the Lord had not called him. A lion does not roar for no reason, nor are people frightened without a cause. Since I am prophesying, it is because the Lord has called me. This is what Amos is saying.[531]

To illustrate the above scenario from Garrett with a personal illustration should help one to grasp rather quickly the teaching of Amos 3:3. In April 1988, I agreed to meet Ervin Waters (1918-2020), who is from Texas, at the airport terminal in Birmingham, AL, on Sunday morning at 8:30am. We met, we talked, and we walked. Thus, our walking together (effect) came about as the result of our appointment previously made (cause). This story illustrates Amos' saying, "Do two walk together unless they have made an appointment?"[532] This verse has nothing to do with our agreement, which is the way many writers make use of this famous passage.

In spite of the voluminous translations and commentaries, which shed tremendous insight as to the intent of Amos, nevertheless, there are still large numbers of trustworthy believers who still cite Amos 3:3 to justify castigation, censure, ostracism, and removal of the dissident from their fellowship. Even though Amos is quoted by many godly men and women to maintain the purity of the party, this misunderstanding, so it seems, is not a deliberate rejection of God's Word, but rather, this lack of correct comprehension is simply an honest mistake of the heart. Many Christians are so used to reading the Bible as they have been taught by generations of interpreters that it is difficult to read the Bible without colored glasses.

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[529]Elizabeth Achtemeier (1926-2002), *Minor Prophets*, in the New International Biblical Commentary (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1996), 190.

[530]Carl Ketcherside, "Except They Be Agreed," *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 11 (November 1965): 162.

[531]Leroy Garrett, "Can Two Walk Together Except They Be Agreed," *Restoration Review* 17, no. 7 (September 1975): 123.

[532]*The New Revised Standard Version*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 1989.

The innumerable traditions of the countless splinter groups have made it almost impossible, if not impossible, to read the Word of God accurately. We might also add that this is especially true with religious leaders—elders and preachers. The leaders of the numerous movements (at least twenty-five factions within the Churches of Christ) have a difficult time hearing God correctly. Justo L. Gonzalez, a United Methodist minister born in Cuba, expresses most concisely the necessity of weighing carefully our traditions, past or present. He writes:

> Without understanding the past, we are unable to understand ourselves, for in a sense the past still lives in us and influences who we are and how we are and how we understand the Christian message. The notion that we read the New Testament exactly as the early Christians did, without any weight of tradition coloring our interpretation, is an illusion. It is also a dangerous illusion, for it tends to absolutize our interpretation, confusing it with the Word of God. . . . Likewise, if we are to break free from an undue weight of tradition, we must begin by understanding what the tradition is, how we came to be where we are, and how particular elements in our past color our view of the present.[533]

DICTIONARY MEANING OF "AGREED"

Various Translations of Amos 3:3

Before investigating more fully the unique interpretation placed upon Amos 3:3 by many Christians within the Churches of Christ, it would be beneficial to search more closely the scholars to determine the definition of the word יָעַד (yā·ʿăḏ, "agreed"). The sole question of the interpreter of Amos' famous saying must be the intent of the author. What meaning did he intend to convey by the Hebrew word יָעַד? The English word *agreed* is from the Hebrew יָעַד, which means: "to fix upon (by agreement or appointment); by impl. To meet (at a stated time) . . . gather (selves, together), meet (together), set (a time)."[534] The basic meaning is to make an "appointment," not unanimity in understanding every Scripture with exactitude. Amos is dealing with two people making an appointment to walk together.

Sometimes it is helpful to consult other translations in order to observe the particular flavor of a word. For instance, the **New International Version** renders this text: "Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?" The **New Revised Standard Version** translates the Hebrew: "Do two walk together unless they have made an appointment?"[535] The **New Jerusalem Bible** interprets the passage this way: "Do two people travel together unless they have agreed to do so?"[536] One more translation is in order to fully establish the meaning of the original intent of the Hebrew word יָעַד that is translated in the King James Version as "agreed." The New American Standard Bible reads: "Do two men walk together unless they have **made an appointment**?"[537]

The root יָעַד (yā·ʿăḏ) occurs four times in the book of Exodus and eighteen times in the Old Testament.[538] Armstrong, Busby, and Carr define יָעַד (yā·ʿăḏ) as "to meet at an appointed place" in Exodus 25:22; 29:42, 43;[539] in Joshua 11:5, "to assemble by appointment";[540] in 2 Samuel 20:5, "to appoint";[541] and in

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[533]Justo L. Gonzalez (b. 1937), *The Story of Christianity*, vol., 1 (San Francisco: Harper, 1984), xvii.

[534]James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible: Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary*, Strong's number 3259 (New York: Abingdon, 1958), 50.

[535]*The New Revised Standard Version*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 1989.

[536]The New Jerusalem Bible: Reader's Edition, (New York: Doubleday.) 1990.

[537]*The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.

[538]See Terry A. Armstrong, Douglas L. Busby, Cyril F. Carr, *A Reader's Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, four volumes in One (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 49.

[539]Ibid., 43, 49.

[540]Ibid., 131.

[541]Ibid., 176.

Amos 3:3, "to meet by appointment."[542] Also, it is informative to observe what Holladay writes: "agree, have an appointment, Amos 3.2."[543]

Examples of the Use of This Hebrew Root (יעד) Word (יָעַד)

An analysis of several Scriptures in which the root יעד (יָעַד, yā·ʿăḏ), occurs should help one in determining the correct meaning to this particular word (יָעַד, yā·ʿăḏ). In the book of Exodus, Moses informs the people of Israel that they were to "Make an atonement cover of pure gold—two and a half cubits long and a cubit and a half wide (25:17). This ark was then placed in the sanctuary. God in detailing this significance of the ark, said to Moses: "There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet (אִוָּעֵד [ʾiw·wā·ʿēḏ, future tense] with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites" (Exodus 25:22). Moses employs the Hebrew root יעד (יָעַד, yā·ʿăḏ), that is utilized by Amos. Then, following these instructions, God also informed Moses that he would meet him at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting:

> For the generations to come this burnt offering is to be made regularly at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting before the LORD. There I will meet (אִוָּעֵד (ʾiw·wā·ʿēḏ) you and speak to you; there also I will meet with the Israelites, and the place will be consecrated by my glory. (Exodus 29:42-43)

Yet again, we observe the Hebrew root יעד used by God is the same word as employed by Amos (3:3). We also notice that as Joshua explains the defeat of the northern kings by the children of Israel, he employs the same root verb (יָעַד, yā·ʿăḏ), in his description of the kings joining forces against Israel:

> They came out with all their troops and a large number of horses and chariots—a huge army, as numerous as the sand on the seashore. All these kings **joined** (וַיִּוָּעֲדוּ (wăy·yiw·wā·ʿăḏw′) forces and made camp together at the Waters of Merom, to fight against Israel. (Joshua 11:4-5)

These kings assembled by appointment. Thomas Finley, author of an exegetical commentary on Amos, reminds his readers that the Targum (Aramaic version of the Old Testament) renders the verb יָעַד (yā·ʿăḏ) in Amos 3:3 with the following translation: "unless they have made an appointment to meet together."[544] Another scholar, Thomas Edward McComiskey, taught Old Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, makes the following succinct observation of the verb "walk":

> The first question (v.3) asks whether two can walk together if they have not agreed to do so. The word "walk" is in the imperfect tense in Hebrew, denoting incompleted action. The question is, Is it customary for two to walk together without agreeing to do so? Certainly two people walking side by side would not be doing so only by sheer coincidence.[545]

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF AMOS 3:3

As we seek to uncover the meaning attached to any particular passage, we should seek to understand the historical background, if possible, of the Scripture(s) in question. Hopefully, this investigation will shed light on the meaning to attribute to a particular word, especially if an interpretation of the citation depends on the meaning assigned to a specific word. This principle is extremely helpful in seeking

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[542]Ibid., 371.

[543]William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 137.

[544]Thomas J. Finley, *Joel, Amos, Obadiah*, The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1990), 182.

[545]Thomas Edward McComiskey, *Amos,* The Expositor's Bible Commentary, volume 7, ed., Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 298.

to uncover a correct interpretation of Amos 3:3. The historical background should shed some light on the meaning we should designate to the word *agreed* as employed in the KJV.

At the time of the writing of this Book (760 BC), both Israel and Judah still existed as nations. Israel (Northern Kingdom) met its final end in 721 BC by the Assyrians. Yet, Judah (Southern Kingdom) did not completely fall until 586 BC under the power of the Babylonians. At the time of Amos' call to the prophetic office, he was a citizen of Judah, and, yet, he prophesied in the Northern Kingdom. The first verse of Amos, together with 7:10-13, places Amos in the middle of the eighth century (760 BC) with Uzziah, king of Judah (792-740) and Jeroboam II, king of Israel (793-798).[546] Jeroboam was fourteen years contemporary with Amaziah and twenty-seven years contemporary with Uzziah, both kings of Judah. Jeroboam's religious leadership, like the first Jeroboam, intentionally encouraged the practices of fertility cults (2 Kings 14:25-25). The social life of the nation was portrayed by adultery, theft, and murder by the government.

Amos disclosed the spiritual corruption under the religious formalism and material prosperity of the time (Amos 5:12, 21). He rebuked the leaders for the deterioration of social justice and morality. Amos, as it were, goes right to the jugular vein of covetousness in order to get the attention of Jeroboam and his leaders. Listen to the prophet as he spells out some of their crimes:

> They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. 7 They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed. Father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name. (2:6-7)

Again, listen to him as he enumerates the utter degradation of the society of Israel: "You who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground" (5:7); then he adds: "you hate the one who reproves in court and despise him who tells the truth. 11 You trample on the poor and force him to give you grain" (5:10-11). Once more, he calls attention the very core of corruption within the judicial system among its leaders: "For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts" (5:12).

In Chapter 7, Amos reveals that Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, accused him of raising a conspiracy in the Northern Kingdom. He dismissed Amos as a prophet for hire whom he did not need to take seriously (7:12). Amos responded to this accusation by saying, "I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. 15 But the LORD took me from tending the flock" (7:14-15a). Again, God speaks to Amos and tells him to prophecy against Israel: "Go, prophesy to my people Israel" (7:15b). Thus, Amos cries out: "Now then, hear the word of the LORD. You say, 'Do not prophesy against Israel, and stop preaching against the house of Isaac'" (7:16).

Beginning with Chapters 1 and 2, Amos proclaims God's vengeance upon Damascus (1:3), Gaza (1:6), Tyre (1:9), Edom (1:11), Ammon (1:13), Moab (2:1), Judah (2:4), and Israel (2:6). God accused Judah for rejecting His law and for not keeping His decrees (2:4). God also condemned Israel for its egregious behavior in the area of social injustice (2:6b). The first eight verses of Chapter 3 contain two messages. These messages provide the background and purpose of Amos' activity as a prophet of God to the nations. First, Amos reminds the Israelites that their deliverance out of Egypt was strictly as a result of God's grace (3:1-2). Israel failed to understand that God's grace demanded responsibility on their part in carrying out God's instructions from His law. We can hardly reflect upon God's condemnation of Israel without reflection upon the words of Jesus as he addressed a crowd of several thousand (Luke 12:1) in which He calls attention to this very principle of privilege: "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked" (12:48b).

[546]See John H. Walton, *Chronological and Background Charts of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 29-31. The dates adopted from this book are those assigned by Thiele.

Election Syndrome

God bestowed upon Israel many privileges: salvation from slavery, special relationship with Himself, a new land flowing with milk and honey, and so on. Not only had God blessed Israel, but He also blessed Judah with the same blessings. God, too, called Judah to serve Him and to represent Him and His holiness to other nations, but Judah failed in their responsibilities to uphold the holiness of God in their day-to-day transactions. Thus God sent Amos to get their attention through the use of cause-and-effect arguments to utterly tear down any defense that Israel and Judah might put forth to try to justify their immoral behavior or ignore the teachings of God. Both nations suffered from what is commonly referred to today as the "election syndrome." In other words, the two nations assumed that their dishonorable behavior did not negate their standing before God.

This kind of reasoning is somewhat on par with the reasoning of many Christians today who advance the notion that since salvation is "once for all," then God will overlook disobedience. Amos says "no" to such foolish thinking. For Amos, one could not reject God's ethical standards without impunity. Amos is saying that when we act in such a way to dishonor God, we can depend on God to take action against such atrocities. How did Amos go about driving home their misconceptions over the so-called "election syndrome"? He did this through cause-and-effect arguments.

All of the arguments were self-evident. Through the employment of cause-and-effect arguments, Amos was able to prepare these two nations for the impending tragedy that was around the corner for Israel (721 BC) and Judah (586 BC). In order to set forth the scenario of destruction, Amos proceeds to lay down a number of arguments in which he sets forth the effect with the cause behind the effect. Before he announces any further judgment upon the nation of Israel, he seeks to establish his right and duty to prophesy by calling forth a chain-like series of similes drawn from life. Listen to him as he seeks to highlight his prophetic office and to illustrate the inevitable consequences of God's rejection of Israel and Judah:

> Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so? [4] Does a lion roar in the thicket when he has no prey? Does he growl in his den when he has caught nothing? [5] Does a bird fall into a trap on the ground where no snare has been set? Does a trap spring up from the earth when there is nothing to catch? [6] When a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble? When disaster comes to a city, has not the LORD caused it? [7] Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets. [8] The lion has roared—who will not fear? The Sovereign LORD has spoken—who can but prophesy? (Amos 3:3-8)

UNIQUE INTERPRETATIONS

When we review the various "party" journals within the Churches of Christ, we quickly become cognizant that we must learn to reevaluate and reinterpret the traditions handed down to the Christian community. Today, each distinct group (approximately twenty-five) within the Churches of Christ maintains that its beliefs constitutes the "doctrine of Christ," that is to say, the distinctive teaching of Christ about the specifics in a so-called worship service and organizational structure of the church. Thus, according to each splinter group, to disagree with its own particular interpretation is tantamount to disagreeing with the Word of God itself. In this basic assumption, many identify what has been handed down through the centuries as synonymous with the Scriptures.

In other words, our interpretation and the Word of God are on par with each other. In examining the traditional interpretation of Amos 3:3, we must not confuse a tradition from the forefathers with the text itself. Subconsciously, equally godly men and women substitute their interpretation(s) with Holy Scripture, not deliberately, but, nevertheless, this methodology of handling the Scriptures is the same. Many Christians today are so used to reading the Scriptures as they have been taught by generations of interpreters that it is difficult not to substitute the traditions for the Word of God itself. The hand-me-down interpretations from the church fathers make it difficult, if not almost impossible, for many sincere believers to read the Word of God accurately.

We may think that we have found a text (Amos 3:3) that gives credence for a narrow concept of fellowship, but when we apply Amos 3:3 for this purpose, then we are reading into the text our own understanding, or perception. In other words, we are reading into the text our own presuppositions, our own prejudices, our own likes and our dislikes, and so on. **We cease to interpret the text by foisting upon the particular passage our brand of prevailing attitude.** To make the text mean something that the text does not mean is to abuse the text.[547]

Once we equate our interpretation with the Word itself, then these traditions are forced upon other believers under the threat of excommunication. The practices of the various divisions within the Stone/Campbell Movement have made it almost impossible for us to read the Word of God without spectacles. Many editors, elders, and preachers have difficulty hearing God accurately because of their heritage. On the other hand, there are many editors, elders, and preachers who seek to hear the writings of God, but many of these men and women also come under the scrutiny of the powerful. Today, we dare not question the interpretation, or rationalization, of many editors, elders, or preachers without fear of retaliation. This philosophy is not isolated to one particular faction, or division, within the Churches of Christ as well as other religious bodies. For us to question the status quo is to question the validity of Scripture.[548]

Subjective Distortions of Amos 3:3

A casual look at the various religious journals within the Stone/Campbell Movement reveals subjective distortions of Amos 3:3. Christians continue to cite this Scripture to justify separation, or disconnection, within God's family. If we take the traditional view of this passage, then the question that concerns every believer is: Are there any exceptions to the general rule enunciated by many writers in their application of this passage? We frequently witness Christians walking together in spite of differences within their own fellowship. Even though many divisions within the Churches of Christ utilize this Scripture, nevertheless, we immediately discover that none apply this principle in an absolute sense. Just how do we harmonize our theories of fellowship with the words of Amos?

Again, we must ask the following question: Is the intent of this passage (Amos 3:3) to teach that there must be perfect agreement before walking unitedly? Can individuals walk together without unanimity of agreement? Do we violate the unanimity of agreement when we do not always agree on every interpretation of Scripture? Or do we resist this Scripture when we disagree with others in so-called secular matters? For instance, do husbands and wives walk together, even when they disagree? Can Christians walk together when they do not see every Scripture "eye-to-eye?"

Paul Discredits the Traditional Interpretation

The answer is a resounding "yes." Just a cursory glance at the writings of Paul explodes the traditional interpretation of Amos 3:3. **An analysis of Romans 14 and 15, along with 1 Corinthians 8, reveals that Christians are encouraged to work together in spite of differences in many theological areas**. For instance, we should reflect upon the following statements from these two books:

> Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. (Romans 14:1)
>
> Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. (14:3)

[547]See Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1982), 22. This book is extremely important in assisting one in the proper methods of correct interpretation of the Bible.

[548]For a more detailed study of this philosophy, see Dallas Burdette, "Where the Scriptures Speak," in *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2008), 87-152. .

> Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand (14:4).
>
> Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. (14:5)
>
> Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. (14:10)
>
> We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. [2] Each of us must please our neighbor for the good purpose of building up the neighbor. [3] For Christ did not please himself. (15:1-2)
>
> May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, [6] so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (15:5-6)
>
> Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that all of us possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. [2] Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge; [3]but anyone who loves God is known by him. (1 Corinthians 8:1-3)
>
> Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that no idol in the world really exists, and that there is no God but one. [5] Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are many gods and many lords— [6] yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. (8:4-6)
>
> It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. [8] Food will not bring us close to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. [9] But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. (8:7-9)

These Scriptures, once and for all, nail the coffin shut on the traditional explanation of Amos 3:3. Paul sets forth in these two epistles the necessity of exercising the "spirit of toleration" within the Christian community. He wanted them to walk together in spite of differences. Even those who cite Amos 3:3 to bolster their factious attitude toward Christians who refuse to kowtow (to kneel in token of homage, worship or deep respect) to outlandish interpretations, we quickly observe that they do not follow their own application in an absolute sense. It is self-evident that when writers or teachers quote Amos 3:3 to justify their disruptive spirit, none apply his or her interpretation in an absolute sense.

For example, some do not concede that it is right for Christians to participate in warfare, or to participate in Bible colleges, or to support orphan homes from the so-called congregational treasury, or to employ individual communion cups, or to participate in the practice of Sunday school, or to allow remarriage for the guilty party in divorce, or to serve leavened bread in the Lord's Supper, or to serve wine in the Lord's Supper, and so on. Yet, in spite of all this diversity, many Christians still walk hand-in-hand with other Christians who do not concur with their particular brand of accepted views.

We speedily detect that we employ a pick-and-choose mentality. In other words, even though countless Christians cite Amos 3:3 to uphold their sectarian attitude toward some believers; nevertheless, this passage is generally interpreted in a relative sense; it all depends on our own concept of orthodoxy. The traditional interpretation turns on the mindset of the person who wants to enforce his or her strange interpretation of Amos 3:3.[549] Yet, we also observe individuals who seek to circumvent their own initial interpretation. Leroy Garrett crisply articulates the inconsistencies advanced by each faction within the Churches of Christ:

> Each of our parties circumvents all this by demanding conformity on "the doctrinal issues," meaning of course the peculiar doctrinal stance of that particular sect. They might differ on what others divide over, while others differ on what

[549]For an examination on how to apply the principles of interpretation, see Dallas Burdette, "False Prophets in the Gospel of Matthew, Who Are They?" (D. Min dissertation, Erskine Theological Seminary, 1999), 36-63.

they divide over, but they make sure that all others line up on what they call the issues or else. Quoting Amos 3:3 of course.[550]

In the early sixties, a close relative of mine justified his separation from me on the basis of Amos 3:3. He advanced the idea that he could not walk me or with others who disagreed with him concerning the issues promoted by his distinctive fellowship of God's people. He cited Amos 3:3 to give credence to his philosophy of departure from me and others. This brother (one cup and non-Sunday school) cited this Scripture against me when I refused to draw lines of fellowship over these issues. In 1998, while visiting his home congregation, I questioned him about the speaker who was conducting a Gospel meeting (Ronny Wade) who held to a different position on the marriage and divorce question than himself. The guest speaker is known for his views on the divorce issue as "the guilty party cannot remarry." On the other hand, the other preacher (Alton Bailey, 1932-2014),[551] believed the opposite position. Yet these two godly men, according to Alton, still walk together. Both of these men are sincere and devout Christians. Yet, they do not hold their differences to be a matter of fellowship. We cannot help but wonder why Amos 3:3 does not apply here. There is no rhyme or reason for the loose application they apply to this text.

Sometimes it is very difficult for us to see inconsistencies in our applications of certain Scriptures. As stated above, years earlier (1960s), Alton Bailey (my first cousin by marriage) cited Amos 3:3 to strengthen his claim for his actions against me over Sunday school and individual communion cups during a Sunday morning service in Birmingham, AL. Yet, he alluded to this passage as an absolute against me and all others who use individual communion cups and Sunday school, but, on the other hand, he makes concession—and still makes concessions—for Ronny Wade who, at that time, thought that the "guilty party cannot remarry." We quickly find that these two believers will not absolutize this Scripture in Amos regarding all differences, only those departures that do not uphold the distinctive fellowship of their persuasion that they deem essential for admission into the eternal kingdom of God.

Alton and I were both taught by the same godly man (E. H. Miller, 1909-1989). Both Alton (1932-2014) and I taught the same faulty interpretation for many years. He was just as sincere then about his interpretation as I am about my new understanding today of this frequently misapplied Scripture. Both of us were brought up on the same diet of misapplied Scriptures. It is impossible for us to maintain the traditional interpretation of Amos 3:3 in an unconditional sense. **This kind of interpretation has to be taught; we cannot learn this from the text**. This Scripture is wrenched from its context in order to give validity to ungodly actions that violate the prayer of Jesus for unity among His disciples.

Another example of inconsistency occurred about twenty-five years ago when I sought to place membership with one of the local congregations (cups and Sunday school Church of Christ) in Montgomery, AL. I was rejected because of my association with Carl Ketcherside (1908-1989) and Leroy Garrett (1918-2015). In addition to this objection, the elders could not agree with me on my position concerning the guilty party in a divorce. **Also, I objected to the position that elders are rulers and that religious leaders are infallible interpreters of the Word of God.** This transaction occurred on a Wednesday evening, but on the following Sunday, the pulpit minister, Dabney Philips (1917-1992), cited Amos 3:3 to uphold the elders' position of rejection.

Yet, this same brother could fellowship Jimmy Allen (1930-2020, 91 years old), professor at Harding University—Church of Christ, who held to a different view concerning the rebaptism controversy.[552] In spite of this disagreement, he held out the right hand of fellowship without citing Amos 3:3. In this scenario, they both walked together, although they were not in agreement on the rebaptism issue. In this particular case, the

[550]Leroy Garrett, "Can Two Walk Together Except They Be Agreed," *Restoration Review* 17, no. 7 (September 1975): 124.

[551]I agree with Alton Bailey (1932-2014) on the belief that the guilty party can remarry. I briefly discussed this with Alton during my visit (10-6-1998) when Ronny Wade (1936-2020) conducted a meeting for the Murphy Ave. Church of Christ in LaGrange, GA.

[552]For a detailed study of rebaptism, see Dallas Burdette (b. 1934), "Rebaptism in the Stone/Campbell Movement," in Dallas Burdette, *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2008), 196-235.

preacher who spoke against me did respond to Jimmy Allen's views with the right attitude. Again, Garrett captures the forbearance that is to saturate the life of every believer:

> *Forbearance* is a Christian virtue that was urged upon the primitive saints again and again, in such terms as "forbearing one another in love" (Eph. 4:2), which shows that differences sometimes ran deep. In a congregation where conformity is the rule there is nothing to forbear. Besides, our acceptance of one another is to be on a kind of "as is" basis, with all our foibles and hang-ups, for that was the ground on which Jesus received us—*even while we were yet sinners.* And so Ro. 15:7: "Receive one another, therefore, as Christ has received you, to the glory of God." That chapter begins by urging: "We who are strong ought to bear with the failing of the weak, and not to please ourselves." The entire 14th chapter of Romans lays down principles whereby differences of opinion are to be handled in the congregation.[553]

CONCLUSION

> 3259. יָעַד ***yāʿaḏ*:** A verb meaning to appoint, to summon, to engage, to agree, to assemble. It also means allotted or appointed time, such as the amount of time David appointed to Amasa [ă-māʾsá] to assemble the men of Judah (2 Sam. 20:5). This word can also take the meaning of appointing or designating someone to be married (Ex. 21:8, 9). Another meaning is to meet someone at an appointed time. **Amos asked the question, <u>How can two walk together unless they appoint a time at which to meet?</u>** (Amos 3:3)?[554]

This chapter is an effort toward making an appointment for God's children to meet together and to walk together. This in-depth study is not to question the integrity of those who cite Amos 3:3 to maintain their separation from other believers, but rather to try to encourage Christians to go back to the "drawing-board" in order to reexamine the traditions that are so entrenched in the mindset of so many godly men and women. The words of **Jaroslav Pelikan** (1923-2006), leading scholar on the history of Christianity and medieval intellectual history, are to the point:

> Like any growth, development may be healthy or it may be malignant, discerning the difference between these two kinds of growth requires constant research into the pathology of traditions. But it is healthy development that keeps a tradition both out of the cancer ward and out of the fossil museum.[555]

In the nineteenth century, **Friedrich Schleiermacher** (1768-1834), German theologian and philosopher, originated the idea of the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle philosophy simply means: "**Each part of a text must be interpreted with reference to the whole; yet the meaning of the whole cannot be grasped without considering the parts**."[556] Interpretation is an attempt to understand the work as a whole by an analysis of its elements.[557] Hermeneutics[558] ordinarily covers the whole field of interpretation, including exegesis. Nevertheless, hermeneutics is often used in a much narrower sense to grasp the relevance of ancient works. In other words, it is concerned about the "here" and the "now."

Having said this, we must never forget that the meaning of a text is the author's meaning. We must reject the traditional interpretation of Amos 3:3 not because it is private but because it is wrong. When we abandon the original author, when we usurp his place, this leads to confusion on the part of the interpreter. The

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[553]Ibid.

[554] Warren Baker and Eugene E. Carpenter, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2003), 455.

[555]Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 60.

[556]Kathleen Morner and Ralph Rausch, "Hermeneutics," *NTC's Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Illinois: NTC Publishing Group, 1991), 97.

[557]Ibid.

[558]See Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 17, where Stein writes: "The term 'hermeneutics,' ... Simply describes the practice or discipline of interpretation." See also Thomas H. Olbright, *Hearing God's Voice* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1996), 185, where he says, "In a large sense, hermeneutics constitutes a theory about how one person explains or communicates a text to another."

author of a text is the determiner of the meaning of his text, not the reader. When we abandon the author, this act "leads an afterlife of its own, totally cut off from the life of its author."[559]

Amos considers his preaching to be the call of God. Since God calls him, he could not refuse to warn Israel of impending destruction through a series of rhetorical questions, questions that all know the answers to. Amos concludes his cause-and-effect arguments by proclaiming the inevitable judgment of God: "Surely the Lord GOD does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets.[8] The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken; who can but prophesy?" (Amos 3:7-8). To state more clearly, Amos considers his call as an appointment with God. Just as we are not likely to see two men or women walking together without having previously made arrangements to meet, so, Amos argues that he was there as a result of an appointment with God: "Do two walk together unless they have made an appointment?" (3:3). We must not allow tradition to deaden our minds with strange ideas and ready-made opinions.

We must be open for discussion. Controversy takes for granted that everyone has had experiences which may contribute something of value to the group. Dialogue perceives that we do not grasp the whole truth, but we search, track, and find some part of it. We must not shut the door on this verse (3:3). We must keep the door of dialogue open. What is dialogue? Dialogue, in a nutshell, is seeking truth. **Thomas Aquinas** (1225-1274), philosopher and theologian, a man acquainted with dialogue, said, "An angel perceives the truth by simple apprehension, whereas man becomes acquainted with a simple truth by a process from manifold data."[560]

A monopoly (exclusive possession or control) of study has no place in dialogue. Ideas must be thrown back-and-forth. There is give-and-take for every believer. **John Heron** is correct to affirm: "Facts are worse than useless unless they are accurate. Inaccuracy does not necessarily mean deceitfulness, but may take the form of not being particular to be exact."[561] Again, he aptly stresses the comparison of views: "It is by comparison of views that we reason our way toward truth. We increase the odds of finding the best solution to a problem by considering alternatives."[562]

Our interpretation of a passage of Scripture must be based upon the historical context. What are the facts presented by the author? **Christians should be able to share their understanding of the facts, right or wrong, as they understand, without fear of being "hacked to death" with a verbal sword.** If not hacked to death, at least we must suffer the dread of excommunication, all in the name of Christ. In conclusion, the following quote from Walter Rauschenbush (1861-1834), American reformer and influential in the evolution of Higher Criticism, calls attention to the precariousness of every Bible student:

> **We see in the Bible what we have been taught to see there**. We drop out great sets of facts from our field of vision. We read other things into the Bible which are not there. . . . If the Bible was not a living power before the Reformation, it was not because the Bible was chained up and forbidden, as we are told, but because **their minds were chained by preconceived ideas**, and when they read, they failed to read.[563] (Emphasis mine—bold)

The next chapter (21) explores one of the most volatile verses in all of Scripture. The word *heretick* (KJV) sends chills up-and-down the spine. This English word takes us back to the days of the Inquisition during the time of the Reformation movement. **The word *heresy* has become synonymous with teaching so-called error. For one to depart from the traditions of the church fathers calls forth the horrid term *heretic***. Chapter 21 sets forth the concept that the Greek word simply denotes a "divisive person," which has nothing to do with the rightness or wrongness of a particular belief. It has to do with an attitude of the mind—a divisive person.

The next chapter (21) highlights another Scripture that is frequently cited against other believers who are outside of one's own meticulous splinter-group. The word *heretic* is generally employed against anyone who dares to differ with the *status quo* (things as they were before the change). The word *heresy* is generally

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[559] E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967), 1.
[560]Quoted in John Heron, "Time to Talk Things Over," *The Royal Bank of Canada Monthly Letter* 50 (August 1969): 3.
[561]Ibid.
[562]Ibid.
[563]Walter Rauschenbush, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (London: Macmillan Co., 1912), 45.

associated with wrong beliefs. Yet, Paul's employment of the word in the Epistle to Titus is associated with an attitude of the heart more than doctrinal correctness of the mind.

21

Who Are the Heretics?

A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; [11] Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself. (Titus 3:10-11, KJV)

Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. [11] You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned. (Titus 3:10-11, NIV)

The word *heretic* sends chills up-and-down the spine. We cannot hear the word *heretic* without the negative overtone of someone who is not sound in the faith. Hundreds of people were executed by the Catholic Church as well as the Church of England for differences in their responses to the various ecclesiastical institutions under the charge of heresy.[564] Today, this word is frequently employed by many well-meaning Christians to castigate anyone who dares to differ with the status quo of their particular brand of orthodoxy. This study seeks to set forth the biblical concept of a "heretic." This study reveals that a biblical heretic is a factious person (**αἱρετικὸν ἄνθρωπον**, *hairetikon anthrōpon*, "a factious man/person"), not necessarily one who has misunderstood some Scripture. Too many Christians are intoxicated by their own traditions to see clearly the teachings of God. It is in this vein that Eden and Cedar Paul seek to capture the negative overtones in the word *heretics* as they relate Castellio's controversy with Calvin:

> Castellio developed his thesis with dispassionate logic, lucidly and irrefutably. The question at issue was whether heretics should be persecuted and punished with death for what was a purely intellectual offence. But before discussing this, Castellio [1515-1563] inquires: "What do we really mean by the term heretic? Whom are we entitled to call a heretic, without being unjust?" Castellio's answer runs: "I do not believe that all those who are termed heretics are really heretics. . . . The appellation has today become so abusive, so terrifying, carries with it such an atmosphere of opprobrium [something that brings disgrace], that whenever a man wishes to rid himself of a private enemy, he finds that the most convenient way is to accuse this foe of heresy. As soon as others hear the dreaded name, they are filled with such overwhelming fear that they stop their ears, and blindly assail not only the alleged heretic, but also those who venture to say a word in his favor."[565]

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[564]For a detailed account of the atrocities committed against Christians within the Church of England and the Catholic Church, see Dallas Burdette, "Where the Scriptures Speak," in Dallas Burdette, *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2008), 87-149

[565]Stefan Zweig, *The Right to Heresy: Castellio against Calvin*, translated by Eden and Cedar Paul (New York: The Viking Press, 1936), 153-154. Sebastian Castellio died on December 29, 1563 before the claws of his enemies could execute him. His death (age 48) put an end to the campaign of calumny (Ibid., 218). Eden and Cedar write, 219:

> There was not a fragment of silverware left in the house. His friends had to provide funeral expenses, pay his trifling debts, and take charge of his children. As if in recompense for the shamefulness of the accusation of heresy, Sebastian Castellio's interment was a moral triumph. Those who had timidly drawn away from him after the charge of heresy had been brought were now eager to show how much they loved and honored him. The funeral train was followed by all the members of the university, the coffin being borne to the cathedral on the shoulders of students, and interred there in the crypt. At their own cost, three hundred of his pupils provided a tombstone on which were chiseled the words: "To our renowned teacher, in gratitude for his extensive knowledge and in commemoration of the purity of his life."

Titus 3:10 is frequently cited by many well-meaning Christians to justify separation from other Christians over controversial interpretations of certain Scriptures. This passage is wrenched from its context to condone the charge of *heresy* against anyone who departs from the so-called watchword of the church fathers. The word *heresy* is frequently associated with wrong beliefs. For instance, if we believe that it is appropriate to praise God with instrumental music, then we are guilty of heresy, at least to the acappella fellowship. If we maintain that individual communion cups for the communion are correct, then the one-cup Christians label the cups users as *heretics*. Why? Because they supposedly are guilty of "false doctrine." This list of violations among the various segments within the Churches of Christ is almost *ad infinitum* (without end).

Depending on which group of saints we meet with, we discover an infringement on their so-called "new law" about public worship is sufficient to receive the label of "heretic." In order for us to be labeled as heretics, we must violate or change the traditional interpretation, that is to say, our interpretation that contradicts the dictates of the group to which we are attached. It is not uncommon for Christians to fail to consult the historical circumstances surrounding the books of the Bible under consideration. Many approach the Word of God that is colored by their environment. They borrow hand-me-down traditions received from their predecessors.

Unfortunately, many of these men and women made use of their sources to convey their particular brand of Christianity. Without thinking, they read into the texts the views that they liked best. Just a perusal of many religious journals reveals that forced and artificial methods of interpretation are piled upon the text. In other words, many believers assign meanings to words that do not belong. Many Christian communities have been transformed into totalitarianism without realizing what has happened to them. We must retrace our steps to find out where we went off the track. **As we seek to eliminate all the underbrush that hides the true meaning of Titus 3:10, we must abandon our fertile imaginations as to what we think the text means by what it says**. The word that creates confusion within the Christian community is the word *heretic*.

The words *heresy* (**αἵρεσις** *hairesis*) and *heretic* (**αἱρετικός** *hairetikos*) are two words that are frequently applied to those who maintain unorthodox teaching, that is to say, teachings not in line with the status quo of certain fellowships. Christians are frequently called *heretics* and charged with *heresy* when they do not subscribe to the tenets of a particular party. Even though we may be true to the Gospel (Jesus as God's way of salvation), still, in spite of our adherence to the Good News of God's redemption "in" and "through" Christ, unless we hold to the "odd" interpretations of a specific fellowship, then we are still castigated as *heretics*. We may believe in God, we may believe in the Deity of Jesus, we may believe in the Holy Spirit, we may believe in the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, and we may believe that God's Word is applicable to every area of our lives, still it is not uncommon for some believers to refer to other believers as *heretics* or charge them with *heresy* when their beliefs differ from the status quo of an exacting faction.

THOMAS B. WARREN

I (Dallas Burdette), in my early ministry, applied Titus 3:10 to any fellowship of believers that refused to interpret the Scriptures in harmony with the religious leaders of the one-cup and non-Sunday school fellowship, but this Scripture is not the property of anyone group of God's people. This Scripture is cited by many fellowships to justify detachment from others when Scripture interpretation departs from the norm of a particular group. Today (2020), for one to express a view that fails to agree with another point of view as advanced by some demanding body of believers, this deviation, or variation, is sufficient to deserve the epithet of *heresy*. Since I came out of the background of Churches of Christ, I can speak from first-hand knowledge of this movement—a movement that started out as a unity movement to unite Christians in all the various denominations.

Today, there are approximately twenty-five or more divisions within the Churches of Christ. Each splinter group claims this passage as its own. For instance, the late Thomas B. Warren's (1920-2000) quotation of this passage is a classic example of the misuse of Titus 3:10 to justify departure from the so-called erring

Christian.[566] According to Warren's view, if one espouses what Warren considers to be "false doctrine," then this person is a *heretic*:

> To be a heretic is to be an espouser and follower of false doctrine. The man who persists in the promulgation of false doctrine—even in the face of efforts to persuade him to repent—must be rejected (refused). Thus, we conclude from the passage: (2) It is possible to be a heretic; (b) Such people should be admonished by faithful brethren; (c) When a heretic will not repent, he must be rejected (refused, withdrawn from) by faithful brethren.[567]

Warren speaks of "faithful brethren." This expression, to Warren, meant conformity to the dictates of his particular brand of Christianity. We must not question his sincerity in his application of Titus 3:10, but his subjective interpretation and dogmatic approach to this passage undermines and denies the very Scriptures he wanted to uphold. In fact, this Scripture, as cited by many godly men and women, would be more applicable to them than to someone else who has misinterpreted some passage of Scripture. In other words, **the word *heretic* has to do with an attitude of the heart more than doctrinal correctness of the mind**. To the unsuspecting, there appears to be truth to his explanation. For example, we can agree that if one is a *heretic*, then he or she must be refused. These individuals—men or women—must be admonished by other Christians to desist in their behavior of factiousness. And, finally, this one must be shunned if he or she continues in this kind of unethical behavior that is disruptive to the unity of the Spirit. Paul also dealt with this kind of behavior in Romans 16:17.[568]

We can also grant this analysis that one who is a biblical heretic must be shunned if they continue in the behavior that Paul addresses, but, on the other hand, we cannot see eye-to-eye with Warren when he says, "To be a heretic is to be an espouser and follower of false doctrine." He is employing a definition that is anachronistic (existing or happening outside its historical order). The implications that he draws from Titus 3:10 are not necessarily true.

His essay is based on a series of unverifiable arguments, which in turn function as assumptions, that is, to the effect that the Apostle Paul had Warren's philosophy in mind when he wrote to Titus. I have not hesitated to reject ancient doctrines when new evidence demonstrates that the traditional interpretation is untenable. I, too, was taught many interpretations by a godly and sincere man of God, but, at the same time, he failed to look at the context in many of his citations from Holy Scripture. Unconsciously, he wrenched Scriptures out of context through piece-meal interpretation. It is time for us to reexamine old texts through new eyes.

It appears, so it seems to me, that Warren's rationalization is similar in nature to the position maintained by Catholic and Anglican Churches during the 14th through the 18th centuries as well as the Spanish Inquisition. The believers in these movements inflicted torture beyond belief over the misunderstanding of the words heresy and *heretic.* Twenty-first century Christians cannot burn individuals at the stake or drown them in rivers, but, nevertheless, they can still infuse stark terror in the hearts of many with the word *excommunicate*. The explanation that Warren assigns to Titus 3:10 is the description that is generally doled out to the words *heresy* and *heretic.* The *Webster's University Dictionary* defines these two words as:

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[566]Even though Thomas B. Warren (1920-2000) has gone on to be with the Lord, nevertheless his writings still remain. Since he is still respected as a scholar, it is necessary to scrutinize his writings to see if he followed the context in his application of certain passages in seeking to give validity to his actions of separation from other believers who could not concur with him in his interpretation of many Scriptures. He, like all of us, brings a certain amount of baggage to the Scriptures, which is inevitable. Still, we have to be conscious of our own presuppositions. My remarks about his essay have nothing to do with my respect for this man whose life was dedicated to Jesus Christ. In my opinion, he mistakenly misapplied certain Scriptures to uphold his exclusivist concept of fellowship. I, too, did this for many years. So, I can sympathize with his struggles in wanting to be true to the Word of God. My analysis of his application of Titus 3:10 is not to condemn, but rather to help bring about a better understanding of the Holy Scriptures in order that the unity for which Jesus prayed might become a reality among His people, even if my comments about his application of Titus 3:10 seem rather blunt at times.

[567]Thomas B. Warren, "We Must Honor God's Law of Exclusion" (Editorial), *The Spiritual Sword* 12, no. 4 (July 1981): 22. Since the writing of this essay, Warren has crossed the great gulf to be with the Lord.

[568] For a more detailed study of Romans 16:17, see Chapter 14 ("Watch Out for Those Who Cause Divisions") in this book, pp. 273-304.

Heresy. **1a**. An opinion or doctrine in conflict with established religious beliefs, esp. dissension from or denial of Roman Catholic dogma by a professed believer or baptized church member. **b.** Adherence to such dissenting opinions or doctrine. **2a.** An unorthodox or controversial opinion or doctrine, as in philosophy, science, or politics. **b.** Adherence to such unorthodox or controversial opinion.[569]

Heretic. 1. One who hold or advocates controversial opinions, esp. one who publicly opposes the officially accepted dogma of the Roman Catholic Church.[570]

It is not uncommon for Christians within the various splinter groups of the Churches of Christ to refuse fellowship with other believers when they decline to adhere to an opinion that is officially accepted as dogma with a particular group. The reason for the negative response is based upon the label *heretic*, which he or she must be accused of in order to preserve the prevailing attitude of the defenders of the faith. Thus, the term *heretic* is indiscriminately associated with the horrible word *heresy*, which, as stated above, brings to mind the *heresy* trials of the Spanish Inquisition. John R. W. Stott (1921-2011), evangelical Anglican, preacher and teacher of Scripture, is quite correct in observing that the traditional interpretation is anachronistic:

Warn a *divisive* person, Paul writes. The Greek word is *hairetikos*, which the AV and (surprisingly NEB translate "heretic'. But his is an anachronism, for the word had not yet assumed this meaning. *Hairesis* means a sect, party or school of thought, and is applied in the Acts to Sadducees, Pharisees and Christians. *Hairetikos*, however, meant somebody who is 'factious' (RSV), 'contentious' (REB) or 'divisive' (NIV).[571]

ALLEN BAILEY: SON OF THE LATE ALTON BAILEY

Another sincere writer and preacher, Allen Bailey (second cousin of mine), of the one-cup and non-Sunday school persuasion, cites this verse as well as many other passages in his essay against so-called false teachers. Just a cursory glance at his many citations reveals that he would consider Thomas B. Warren a *heretic*, that is, one guilty of *heresy*.[572] We almost stand in disbelief as we encounter the many individuals whom he labels as false teachers in his study. The definition that Warren and Bailey assign to these words through their writings does not come from the Bible, but rather from the traditions of men. In this lengthy study by Bailey, he cites twenty-eight Scriptures to give validity to his castigation of men who do not concur with his particular brand of orthodoxy. In this numerous accumulation of Scripture references, he also quotes Titus 3:10.

In his essay, he has a subtitle—False Doctrines of the Twentieth Century—which takes in the "Promise-Keepers Movement,"[573] "Catholic Evangelical Accord,"[574] "Calvinism,"[575] "Grace-Faith-Works Issue,"[576]

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[569]Webster's *II New Riverside University Dictionary*, 1984 ed., s. v. "heresy."

[570]Ibid., s.v. "heretic."

[571]John R. W. Stott (1921-2011), *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 210.

[572]Allen Bailey, "Beware of False Teachers," Preachers' *Study Notes: 1994 Preachers' Study* (Buffalo, Missouri: Christian's Expositor Publications, 1996), 69-82. As stated above concerning Thomas B. Warren and Allen Bailey, both men wish to be true to the Word of God. Having said this, Bailey received his interpretation of Titus 3:10 from two men—E.H. Miller (1909-1989) his grandfather and my uncle) and his father and my first cousin (Alton Bailey. Both Alton and I received our training and understanding from E. H. Miller [1909-1989] (my uncle and Alton Bailey's father-in-law). The three of us—myself, Alton (1932-2014), and Allen—grew up in a fellowship in which grace was not discussed. It is significant that Allen calls attention to this neglect in his childhood and early ministry. Allen Bailey, to express in his own words this poverty of grace in preaching, says,

Brothers, sisters, and friends, please listen. I do have some concerns and sympathy toward the confusion on this problem. By and large we have all been raised with law-law-law and little or no grace taught. I was raised in a congregation [Murphy Ave. Church of Christ, LaGrange, GA.] with three full length gospel meetings every year. I don't remember preachers preaching the subject of grace. I worked closely with several congregations in Missouri, and though I attended their meetings for thirteen years, I cannot remember one lesson given on grace. I have been preaching for nineteen years and have just recently began to teach on Grace. We must remember that to preach grace is to preach Jesus Christ for "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (Jn. 1:17) [Ibid., 78,79].

[573]Ibid., 75.

"Liberal Views on Fellowship,"[577] "The Truth About the Church of Christ—Hugh F. Pyle," [578] "Televangelists (T. V. Evangelist Pat Robertson (b. 1930) and the 700 club, Oral Roberts (1918-2009), Jim Baker, Jimmy Swaggart, Robert Tilton (b. 1946), etc.),"[579] "Pastor Pet Peters,"[580] "John McArthur,"[581] "J. Vernon McGee (1904-1988)," [582] and on and on he goes. Titus 3:10 is just one of twenty-eight Scriptures he cites to give soundness to his charge of "False Teachers." He writes: "To this concern, and all others, I sound the alarm—*beware of false teachers*!"[583]

Under the umbrella of Titus 3:10, he includes those within the Churches of Christ who seek a wider fellowship with other believers; anyone who is willing to cross the dictates of a few self-appointed watchdogs for the orthodoxy of a small segment of God's people. And furthermore, he brings in those who teach that salvation is by faith in Jesus, not works. We must take for granted, even though Titus 3:10 does not employ the words "false teachers," that Bailey considers the word *heretic* as synonymous with "false teachers," which in turn is identified as "false teaching."

This particular Scripture is cited to condemn Christians, such as the late Warren who used individual communion cups and participated in Sunday school. This philosophy about Titus 3:10 and its application are not new with Bailey. He cut, as it were, his eyeteeth on this passage. I, too, also cut my eyeteeth on this passage. I, as well, misapplied this Scripture for over seventeen years of my ministry. His misunderstanding and my misunderstanding was/is not rebellion against the teachings of Holy Scripture, but rather, it was/is simply an honest mistake of the heart.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit did not employ the traditional meaning generally assigned to this word *heretic*. In the New Testament, the word *heresy* does not suggest truth or error—good or bad. The English word *heresy* is anglicized from the Greek **αἵρεσις**, *hairesis*. E. P. Gould puts it graphically:

> "Heresies" is a transliteration, but not a translation, of the Greek word, which has come over into the English with a different meaning from its ordinary Greek, or New Testament, meaning.[584]

The Greek expression **αἵρεσις** (*hairesis*) did not originally denote anything good or bad; but rather, the word simply meant "choice" or "the act of choosing." The Septuagint (LXX) uses *hairesis* to refer to the gift that one chooses to offer to God (Leviticus 22:18). Also, Moses employs *hairesis* to describe the choice of Simeon and Levi (Genesis 49:5). We quickly observe that in the LXX, the word may relate to choices, which may be good or bad. Both Paul and Peter employ this word as Partyism (1 Corinthians 11:19; Galatians 5:20; 2 Peter 2:1; Titus 3:10).

God condemns this kind of attitude—a stance of divisiveness, or factiousness. Luke also uses this same word but not in a bad sense. For instance, he writes, "Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party (**αἵρεσις** *hairesis*) of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy" (Acts 5:17). Later, Luke gives a brief overview of Paul's trial before Felix in which the word *hairesis* is employed. At this trial, Tertullus, a lawyer, brought charges against Paul with the following words: "We have found this man to be a

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[574]Ibid., 77.
[575]Ibid.
[576]Ibid., 78
[577]Ibid., 79.
[578]Ibid., 80.
[579]Ibid.
[580]Ibid.
[581]Ibid.
[582]Ibid.
[583]Ibid., 81
[584]E. P. Gould, *First Corinthians*, in *An American Commentary on the New Testament*, vol., 5 ed., Alvah Hovey, Reprint Edition , nd (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication, 1887), 97.

troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect (**αἱρέσεως** *haireseōs*)" [24:5].

At a glance, it might appear that the "Nazarene sect" is used in a bad sense, but the derogatory remarks by Tertullus are not against the sect, as such, but against Paul as a "ringleader" of the Nazarene sect. Paul's response to the accusation is an argument that he is loyal to the Jewish religion:

> My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone at the temple, or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere else in the city. [13]And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me. [14] However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect (**αἵρεσιν** *hairesin*). I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets. (24:12-14)

Again, Luke records Paul's arrival at Rome and his request to meet with the leaders of the Jews. In the course of the conversation, they informed Paul that they had not heard anything bad about him. The leaders then informed Paul that they wanted to know his views concerning the sect (**αἱρέσεως** *hairesin*) that so many were talking against (28:17-22). Paul considered himself a loyal and orthodox Jew until his dying day. Yes, Christians today are members of the "Nazarene sect," but, at the same time, God condemns sects within THE SECT.

The Scriptures give no indication that the word *hairesis* has anything to do with opinions or doctrines, whether true or false. We can be guilty of *hairesis* even with the truth (see Romans 16:17). The word simply means sect or party, whether good or bad, or indifferent. Within Judaism, there were several sects, but with Christianity there are parts but not parties (see 1 Corinthians 3:1-23). Within the Christian community, every believer is to make every effort to protect the "unity of the Spirit." Listen to Paul as he makes his plea for harmony within the body of Christ:

> As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. [2]Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. [3] Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. [4] There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called—[5] one Lord, one faith, one baptism; [6] one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. [7] But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. (Ephesians 4:1-7)

Every sect within the Nazarene sect must surrender its opinions as a bond of union. If we surrender our opinions, what remains to unite Christians? The answer is found in the Gospel facts alone. Paul builds his case for maintaining the unity of the Spirit upon seven "ones" (4:1-7). These facts alone can unite Christians. It goes, almost with saying, that "the faith" is public property, but, on the other hand, opinions are private property. The Scriptures declare that there is "one faith" (Jesus is the object of this one faith), but nowhere does it state there is "one opinion." Alexander Campbell (1788-1866), early leader in the Second Great Awakening of the religious movement that has been referred to as the Restoration Movement within the Churches of Christ, captures the very essence of Paul's admonition to Titus with the following succinct words:

> I will now show how they cannot make a sect of us. We will acknowledge all as Christians who acknowledge the gospel facts, and obey Jesus Christ. . . . If he will dogmatize and become a factionist, we reject him—not because of his opinions, but because of his attempting to make a faction, or to lord it over God's heritage.[585]

THE HERETIC AND THE FALSE TEACHER

The word *heretic* (**αἱρετικός**, *hairetikos*) appears but once in the New Testament (Titus 3:10). The NIV translates this verse: "Warn a divisive person (**αἱρετικόν ἄνθρωπον**, *hairetikon anthrōpon*) once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him." The NASB translates this verse as: "Reject a factious man after a first and second warning"[586] The NCV renders this passage: "After a first and second

[585]Alexander Campbell, *Christianity Restored* (Rosemead, California: Old Paths Book Club, 1959), 122, 123.
[586]*The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1996.

warning, avoid someone who causes arguments."[587] This person of whom Paul speaks is an individual who is the head of a faction. He or she is the promoter of a sect or party within the body of Christ, which is one. Paul is saying that the *heretic* is one who has decided that he or she is right and everyone else is wrong to the point of creating division over his or her opinion or opinions. The following extract from William Barclay (1907-1978), Church of Scotland minister and Professor of Divinity and Biblical Criticism at the University of Glasgow, may help to explain the original meaning of the word *heretic:*

> The English word heresy is to all intents and purposes a transliteration of the Greek word *Hairesis*. In English, heresy is a word with a distinctively bad meaning; it denotes a belief which is contrary to orthodoxy and to true doctrine. But in Greek *Hairesis* is not necessarily a bad word for it means either an act of choosing or a choice.... It is the breaking up of the unity of the Church into cliques who shut their circle to all but their own number.... There is all the difference in the world between believing that we are right and believing that everyone else is wrong. Unshakable conviction is a Christian virtue; unyielding intolerance is a sin.[588]

We may be correct in our interpretation of the Scriptures and still be a *heretic* in the biblical sense of the word. The Christians at Rome—whether weak or strong—were encouraged to allow for discrepancies of opinions concerning the eating of meats and the keeping of certain days. He went right to the very heart of the spirit of intolerance in seeking to maintain the unity created by the Holy Spirit. For instance, Paul began his analysis of diversity existing among the members of the Christians at Rome with a startling statement: "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters" (Romans 14:1). Then Paul succinctly asked: "Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand" (14:4). Following his discussion of variations within the body of believers at Rome, he issues the following orders: "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (15:7). In other words, Christ had accepted all of them with imperfection in their lives and in their knowledge.

Thus, Paul is saying that they should accept one another in the same fashion that Christ accepts them—"warts and all." Even though some were mistaken in their knowledge, still they were not accused of *heresy*. If on the other hand, the "knowing ones" persisted in destroying the unity of the body of Christ in order to enforce unity-in-conformity, then Paul would have called them *heretics*. Paul, in concluding this epistle (Romans), issues a warning toward those who were not willing to make allowances for irregularity in discernment of God's Word: "I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them" (16:17).

What had they learned? We should reread Chapters 14 and 15 of the Book of Romans to understand what they had learned. These two chapters deal with the spirit of toleration in spite of differences in opinions. For those not willing to exercise patience with those who understood things differently, Paul says that one should keep an eye on those who insist that it is my way or no way. This mental mindset is what Paul confronts in his letter to Titus. The context of Titus 3 reveals that Paul is dealing with individuals who insist that it is my way or no way at all.

Paul, too, had to confront the same mental attitude in Corinth concerning imperfection in understanding the true nature of the Godhead. Paul writes six chapters (8-13) dealing with dissimilarity within the congregation. He begins Chapter 8 with words that may possibly have been upon the lips of some of the believers: "Now about food sacrificed to idols: **We know that we all possess knowledge**" (1 Corinthians 8:1). Once more, William Barclay (1907-1978) uses the following pregnant words in his comments on this passage:

> Nothing ought to be judged solely from the point of view of knowledge; everything ought to be judged from the point of view of love. The argument of the advanced Corinthians was that they knew better than to regard an idol as anything; their knowledge had taken them far past that. There is always a certain danger in knowledge. It tends to make a man arrogant and feel superior and look down unsympathetically on the man who is not as far advanced as himself. Knowledge which does that is not true knowledge. But the consciousness of intellectual superiority is a dangerous thing.

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[587] *The New Century Version*, (Dallas, Texas: Word Publishing) 1987, 1988, 1991.

[588] William Barclay, *Flesh and Spirit* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), 58, 59, 60.

> Our conduct should always be guided not by the thought of our own superior knowledge, but by sympathetic and considerate love for our fellow man. And it may well be that for his sake we must refrain from doing and saying certain otherwise legitimate things.[589]

Paul calls attention to the arrogance of so-called intellectual superiority by a few: "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. [2] **The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know** (8:1b-2). How does God react toward the man or woman who loves Him, but still does not get the picture fully? Is God like a motorcycle cop riding around waiting for the least infraction of the law in order to zap him or her? How should we react to imperfection in knowledge? How many Christians comprehend the teachings of God as they ought? Paul says that the person who thinks he or she has a handle on everything is just barking up the wrong tree.

Again, how does God feel about someone who is lacking in "picture perfect" information? Are there any mitigating circumstances in which God makes allowances? Listen to Paul as he nips the arguments of the "knowing ones" in the bud: "But the man who loves God is known by God" (8:3). This is one of the greatest statements in all of Scripture. **If a man loves God**, says Paul, **God knows this man**. This statement goes against the grain of the present day philosophy of "unity-in-conformity." Paul advances the notion of "unity-in-diversity" in First Corinthians, Romans, and Titus.

Paul correctly says through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, "There is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live" (8:6). Yes, there is "one God" and "one Lord." But did everyone appreciate this truth? Listen to Paul once more: "But not everyone knows this" (8:7). Were these folks still Christians and in fellowship with God and Christ? Again, Paul gives the proper response as to how Christians should treat one another over this controversial issue that threatens to divide the unity of the Spirit:

> Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. [10] For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? [11]So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. (8:9-11)

Earlier, in this chapter, attention was called to six chapters in First Corinthians in which Paul dealt with diversity within the Corinthian congregation. After developing his thoughts, we observe the master builder reaching the climax of his literary masterpiece of unity within the body of Christ. He does this in the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians. This chapter is generally disconnected and isolated from its context of concreteness and interpreted with abstraction—nothing to really sink the teeth into. How does Paul deal with this imperfection in knowledge? The answer is love. The same response that he set forth in Chapter 8: "The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. [3] **But the man who loves God is known by God**" (vv. 2-3). Yet again, one should observe verse two again: "The man who thinks he knows something **does not yet know as he ought to know**." Now, pay attention to Paul as he concludes his analysis of discrepancies within the fellowship:

> Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. [13] And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. (13:12-13)

How do we deal faithfully with this subject of "Who Are the Heretics?" without repeating the same themes time and again? Repetition is sometimes necessary in order to cause individuals to reread the text anew. Again, we should reexamine old texts through new eyes. The task of discarding the underbrush of traditions heaped upon Titus 3:10 is a monumental undertaking. We should remember that repetition is a good teacher. In

[589]William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians*, The Daily Study Bible Series, Revised Edition (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), 76.

the early 70s, my Greek and Hebrew professor (Lawrence Barclay) taught that there are three laws to learning: (1) repetition, (2) repetition, and (3) repetition.

The biblical *heretic* is the man or woman who has a sectarian spirit. Many devout and sincere Christians within the Churches of Christ as well as other denominational bodies have failed to consider the context of Titus 3:10 and the "common sense" interpretation of the real world, not in the fantasy world. Even though we may argue that "common sense" is not a good guide in the interpretation of Scripture, still, if something goes against the grain ("common sense"), then we ought to reexamine our own presuppositions to see if they are in harmony with the Word of God. If something does not have a "ring of truth," we should at least go back to the drawing board to reexamine our preconceived notions.

An illustration of "common sense interpretation" is found in the writings of Carl Ketcherside (1908-1989), preacher and author: "Men can be mistaken without being malicious. They can fail to understand without falling away from Jesus."[590] For a second time, no one has expressed the danger of the party spirit with its desire to hold back growth in knowledge better than Ketcherside: "Every faction seeks to freeze knowledge at an arbitrary partisan level, and every such faction does it by skimming off the brains."[591] One more example of "common sense interpretation" from Ketcherside should suffice to nail the coffin shut on those who wish to make conformity the criterion by which fellowship is extended to believers:

> Those who were in Christ in the days of the apostles were in error on many points. They were mistaken about a lot of things but they were not charged with "preaching another gospel." Freedom from error is not a condition of salvation else all men would be damned. We are not saved by attainment to a certain degree of knowledge but by faith in Christ Jesus. It is by belief of facts related to him, and not by grasp of abstract truth, that we are justified before God. Certainly it is not by performance of meritorious deeds nor by legalistic conformity. When we postulate a program of justification by knowledge we hang ourselves on the gallows we have constructed to rid ourselves of others, unless we are prepared to make ourselves even more ridiculous by affirming that we know as much as God.[592]

One of the founders of the fellowship known as the Churches of Christ addresses this issue of various levels of knowledge in trying to correct the sectarian spirit in his own day. The Churches of Christ are notorious for using the word *denomination* to refer to other religious bodies, but, at the same time, they exclude themselves as if they, and they alone, belong to the "true" church, which is not a denomination.[593]Alexander Campbell (1788-1866) paints a picture with words that captures "common sense interpretation," mentioned earlier, in describing the deplorable conditions of disunity within the Christian community. The Christians in his day were just as divided over issues as the Churches of Christ are today. Listen to Campbell's timely words of warning:

> Amongst Christians there is now, as there was at the beginning a very great diversity in the knowledge of the Christian institution. There are babes, children, young men, and fathers in Christ now, as well as in the days of the Apostle John.

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[590]Carl Ketcherside, "Analysis of Apostasy," *Mission Messenger* 27, no., 5 (April 1965): 51.

[591]Carl Ketcherside, "Gospel and Doctrine," *Mission Messenger* 27, no., 2 (February 1965): 18.

[592]Carl Ketcherside, "Another Gospel," *Mission Messenger* 27, no 1 (January 1965): 6-7.

[593]This statement, no doubt, sends chills up-and-down the spines of many Christians. Yet, one of the founders of the movement known as the Churches of Christ was honest enough to refer to this movement as a denomination. Keep your mind on Campbell as he explains his movement:

> Whenever the history of this effort at reformation shall have been faithfully written, it will appear, we think, bright as the sun, that our career has been marked with a spirit of forbearance, moderation, and love of union with an unequivocal desire for preserving the integrity, harmony, and co-operation of all who teach one faith, one Lord, and one immersion. In confirmation of this fact I am happy to add that no Baptist of good character for piety and morality, has ever been, because of a diverse theory or opinion, excluded from our communion or communities.... We, as a **denomination,** are as desirous as ever to unite and co-operate with all Christians on the broad and vital principles of the New and everlasting Covenant [emphasis mine—RDB] (Alexander Campbell, "The Editor's Response to Mr. Broaddus," *Millennial Harbinger***,** New Series, 4, no. 12 (December 1840): 556.)

> This, from the natural gifts of God, from the diversities of age, education, and circumstances, is unavoidable. And would it not be just as rational and as scriptural to excommunicate one another, because our knowledge is less or greater than any fixed measure, as for differences of opinion or matters of speculation?
>
> Indeed, in most cases where proscription [to denounce or condemn—RDB] and exclusions now occur in this country, the excluded are the most intelligent members of the society; and although no community will accuse a man because he knows more of his Bible than his brethren, and on this account exclude him from their communion; yet this, it is manifest, rather than heresy, (of which, however, for consistency's sake, he must be accused,) is, in truth, the real cause of separation.
>
> If God has bestowed better gifts or better opportunities on one man than another, by which he has attained more knowledge, instead of thanking God for his kindness to the community, they beg God to take him away; and if he will not be so unkind, they will at length put him from among them under the charge of heresy. In most instances the greatest error of which a brother can be guilty, is to study his Bible more than his companions—or, at least, to surpass them in his knowledge of the mystery of Christ.[594]

The context of Titus 3:10 does not teach that one who fails to subscribe to certain rules and regulations that other Christians seek to impose upon him or her are guilty of *heresy*. We are not *heretics* simply because we cannot conscientiously concur with the orthodox position of a particular party. We can be mistaken without being rebellious. We can fail to understand without falling away from Jesus. Our position on the use of individual containers to distribute the fruit of the vine in the Lord's Supper, Bible classes for teaching the Word of God to different age groups, chartered homes in which to rear and care for orphans, belief in pre-millennialism, teaching that the Book of Revelation was written before June AD 68, praising God with instruments of music, and so on, does not, in and of itself, constitute *heresy* or the epithet *heretic*.[595]

No one who is honestly mistaken about some matters of scriptural interpretation is a *heretic*. For one to be a *heretic*, one must make a test of fellowship out of his or her opinions and then attempt to establish a party to promote or protect that view. The *heretic* is one who brands and stigmatizes humble seekers after truth whose character is above reproach and whose only crime is that they cannot be of the same mindset in every point of view or opinion held by those who have assumed the role of infallible interpreters. This mindset of intoleration for various viewpoints is the subject matter that Paul warns against in his Epistles—First Corinthians, Romans, and Titus.

CONCLUSION

Again, we need to reexamine this old text through new eyes. The *heretic* is one who seeks his or her own way, whether right or wrong in one's interpretation. Paul is writing to Titus who is acting as pastor for a group of believers. He is not discussing the issues that John addresses in his Epistles concerning Jesus coming in the flesh and the denial that Jesus is the Messiah (2 John 7-10; 1 John 2:22-23) nor Paul's admonition to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 5 (man having sex with his father's wife). My objective in writing this chapter is to promote unity among God's people. I do not question the integrity of the men that I have reviewed in this study. I regard them as sincere and devoted to the things of God, but, at the same time, they are misinformed as to the true intent of Titus 3:10.

We, as a Christian community, must learn to examine a text within its ***immediate*** context, its ***remote*** context, and its ***larger*** context (other Scriptures dealing with the same subject outside of the book itself). If we, as a body of believers, wish to restore unity within the various Christian fellowships within Christendom, we must stop piece-meal interpretation. Citing a Scripture verbatim is not the answer. We must seek to uncover the author's intent through the ***immediate*** (verse immediately preceding and following) and ***remote*** context (the book itself). In conclusion, a citation from Leroy Garrett (1918-2015), professor and author, captures eloquently the role of so-called *heretics* down through the centuries:

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[594] Alexander Campbell, "To Mr. William Jones, of London, Letter IV," *Millennial Harbinger* 6, no. 3 (March 1835): 112.

[595] I recommend the following essays on this subject as two of the most informative articles written on this subject: Carl Ketcherside, "What Is Heresy," *Mission Messenger* 25, no., 3 (March 1963): 39-44; Leroy Garrett, "Who Is A Heretic?" *Mission Messenger* 25, no., 3 (March 1963): 33-39.

> The roll call of heretics in the history of thought is more honorific than it is infamous. The prophets who were stoned as heretics lie buried in tombs that are garnished by later generations. The scientists who were once silenced and excommunicated for their heterodoxy are today among the heroes admired by every schoolboy who studies the history of nations. The philosophers who were once exiled and poisoned as schismatics are now among the respected names in the annals of thought.[596]

The next chapter (22) seeks to bring together the very heart of this study (*Old Texts through New* Eyes). Since Jesus prayed for unity among His people, it is incumbent upon His people to work for the unity for which He prayed. This chapter calls attention to the Christians in Corinth, the Christians in Rome, and to the various slogans that we often fail to differentiate in order to maintain the unity for which our Lord Jesus prayed (John 17).

[596]Leroy Garrett, "Who Is A Heretic?" *Mission Messenger* 25, no., 3 (March 1963): 33.

22

Unity in Jesus

> Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. And, I suppose I should add, it is traditionalism that gives tradition such a bad name. The reformers of every age, whether political or religious or literary, have protested against the tyranny of the dead, and in doing so have called for innovation and insight in place of tradition.[597]

This chapter is designed to assist elders, preachers, and members within the Christian community to become more adept in correctly handling the Word of God (2 Timothy 2:15). In order to accomplish this goal, it is my intention to share with leaders and members the tools needed to recapture the art of how to read the Bible in order to maintain the unity for which Jesus prayed in His priestly prayer (John 17:20-23). This chapter analyzes Paul's handling of differences within the congregations at Rome and Corinth.[598] This brief analysis of Unity in Jesus demonstrates that imperfection in understanding does not, in and of itself, warrant the stigma of false teacher as a result of misinterpretation. Also this investigation discusses the failure on the part of many Christians in their oversight to differentiate between certain views that have contributed to a breakdown of unity among God's people.

To illustrate the importance of the unity for which Jesus prayed, Paul is called upon to emphasize the urgency of the matter. It is in this regard that Paul pleaded with Christians at Ephesus to "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit (**τὴν ἑνότητα τοῦ πνεύματος**, *tēn henotēta tou pneumatos*, "the Spirit's unity") through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). This unity is not created by us, but rather this unity is the Spirit's unity. We are under a mandate from the Holy Spirit to maintain His unity. This mandate is essential on the part of every believer in order to fulfill the prayer of Jesus for unity so that the world may believe. Not only did Paul plead with the Ephesians, he also encouraged the Christians in Rome to "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (Romans 15:7).

Since God accepted the Christians at Rome with imperfection in their lives and in their knowledge, then Paul called upon them to exercise the same kind of love and forbearance toward their fellow Christians for whom Christ died. Many devout Christians do not realize the purpose of Jesus' prayer because they do not discern who is or who is not a false teacher in the light of the context of Matthew's narrative. Unfortunately, many Christians latch onto the epithet "false prophets" by Jesus in Matthew's Gospel without reference to the context.[599] Jesus prayed for oneness and Paul also called for union. This exposition explores ways to bring about the fulfillment of Jesus' and Paul's prayer for singularity of purpose.

Since my personal ministry is secondarily confined within the parameters of the Churches of Christ, I feel that a part of my ministry is to help correct the abuses of God's Word handed down to us from our forefathers within the Churches of Christ. This movement (Campbell/Stone) started out as a unity movement, but soon crystallized into warring factions, each promoting its own brand of Christianity.[600] Today, we soon

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[597]Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 65.

[598]For a more detailed analysis of unity, see Dallas Burdette, "Introduction" in Dallas Burdette, *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood, FL: Xulon, 2008), xvii-xxx.

[599]See Chapter 4 for a detailed study of Book of Matthew, which study surveys the "false prophets" in light of context.

[600]See Thomas Campbell, "Declaration and Address," in C. A. Young, *Historical Documents Advocating Christian Union* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, reprint, 1985), 107, 108 where he writes in Proposition One:

discover that there are approximately twenty-five divisions within this once united movement—each claiming to be the "loyal" church.

Each group maintains that it speaks where the Bible speaks and is silent where the Bible is silent.[601] For individuals who refuse to subscribe to the orthodoxy of a particular group often receive the ominous label of "false teachers." Whenever a distinctive religious group sets forth its interpretation of a singular Scripture, then for us to disagree with that traditional exposition is tantamount to disagreeing with God Himself. In this philosophy of explanation, we do not distinguish between our critique of God's Word and the Word of God itself. If one group sets forth a perception of Scripture that does not conform to the status quo of another camp, then the "at odds" fellowship is accused of not speaking where the Bible speaks.

Unity, as a whole, among many Churches of Christ as well as other denominations is based upon conformity, not unity in diversity.[602] Numerous Christian fellowships are returning to the biblical concept of unity in diversity, and, as a result of this stance on unity in diversity by many elders, preachers, and members of the body of Christ, the unity in conformity group labels the unity in diversity fellowship as false teachers or liberal brethren.[603]

Today, the Churches of Christ are hopelessly engaged in combat. These skirmishes are based upon a faulty reading of many Scriptures that are employed as means of justification for separation from other Christians. One such Scripture is Matthew7:15: "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves."

In order to combat this loose type of explanation, it is necessary to expound upon the principles of examination to combat an illegal use of Scriptures to foster division. The Word of God provides its own environment for a proper comprehension of its teachings. This chapter accepts the presupposition that false prophets are **not necessarily** individuals who fail to make clear the Scriptures, but rather the false prophets/teachers are individuals whose ethical behavior is not in harmony with God's Law. To accomplish this target of correctly identifying the false prophets in the Gospel of Matthew, as cited above, we must learn how to read the Scriptures with understanding—especially Scriptures with narrative interpretation.

In other words, we must study in detail the context in which the phrase "false prophets" occurs, otherwise, this lack of awareness may present us with obstacles that might hinder a proper application of a healthy comprehension as to whom the phrase false prophets designates. This in-depth development of context[604] is essential for proper growth and development and unity in God's **ἐκκλησία**, (*ekklēsia,* "an assembly, a congregation, a society, a church"). To facilitate the usefulness of contextual studies, this chapter briefly explores two congregations in biblical times in which differences existed in order to help believers in Christ today to determine how Christians should react to similar circumstances in which deficiency in knowledge was prevalent.

That the Church of Christ upon earth is **essentially**, **intentionally**, and **constitutionally** one; consisting of all those in every place that profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him in all things according to the Scriptures, and that manifest the same by their tempers and conduct, and of none else; as none else can be truly and properly called Christians.

[601] See Dallas Burdette, "Where the Scriptures Speak," in *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2008), 87-152.

[602] For an example of this mindset, see Jerry Dickinson, "Unity in Diversity," *Old Paths Advocate* LXVII, no. 8 (August 1995): 1, 8-9. The one-cup, non-Sunday school, grape juice only, bread pinchers, and so on, publish this particular journal. See also Don L. King, "Proper Perspective," *Old Paths Advocate* LXVII, no. 9 (September 1995):2, 7. Billy D. Dickinson writes another insightful article that discloses the inner feelings of this peculiar fellowship, "False Teachers and Fellowship," *Old Paths Advocate* LXVIII, no. 10 (October 1995): 1, 9.

[603] See J. E. Choate (1916-2013, 97 years old), "The Baby Boomers and Unity in Diversity," *Firm Foundation* 108, no. 8 (August 1993): 18-20.

[604]In order to ascertain the meaning that is attached to any word or phrase, we must examine the context. The word "context" is from Latin, which means to "weave together" and is applied to written documents. The context is the connection of thought that runs through every passage, which constitutes for itself a whole. The immediate context is that which immediately precedes or follows a given word, phrase, or sentence. Not only must the context be considered, but we must also investigate the scope and plan of the author.

THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH

Within the Churches of Christ, the epithet "false teacher" is assigned to individuals who do not vouch to a particular interpretation of a distinctive fellowship. Correctness in doctrine, according to some, is the measurement of right standing before God. Imperfection in one's knowledge calls forth the title of false prophet or teacher. Since this study is concerned about unity in Jesus, the proper identification of false prophets in the Gospel of Matthew should help us to dispel an incorrect classification as to who is and who is not a false prophet in Matthew's Gospel.

Paul rebukes the Corinthians for not making allowances for shortcomings in understanding among some believers in the congregation. Paul calls attention in his first letter to Corinth to a wrong perception of correctness as the criterion by which one is placed in a right relationship with God.

> Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge.[a] Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. [2]The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. [3]But the man who loves God is known by God. (1 Corinthians 8:1-3)

Paul did not castigate, or criticize, those with imperfection in knowledge as false teachers/prophets. As we peruse, or read carefully, the various citations from Scripture, we immediately recognize that deformity in knowledge does not necessarily mean that one is a false teacher. In the Corinthian letter, Paul is clearly dealing with insufficient knowledge and one's relationship to God—a relationship based upon love, not upon absolute knowledge.

Paul develops in the Corinthian letter the concept that God loves the person with limited knowledge as well as the person with clear insight. With Paul, as long as one loves God—in spite of deficiency in aptitude—this person is acceptable to God. The "intent of the heart" does play an important role in deciding who is and who is not acceptable to God. Paul further demonstrates the principle of love and relationship in the following comments about idols and one's belief system:

> So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. [5]For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), [6]yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. [7] But not everyone knows this. (8:4-7a)

THE ROMAN CHURCH

To set the stage for sounder principles of hermeneutics, a brief reflection upon Romans 14 and 15 should shed further light on how Paul reacted toward those whose knowledge was deficient. In these two chapters, Paul deals with those who wanted to make exact interpretation the criterion by which we determine our faithfulness or unfaithfulness to God. The first four verses of Chapter 14 demonstrate forcefully Paul's attitude in this matter of reception and rejection. Paul captures this spirit of patience in graphic language in this letter to Rome.

> Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. [2]One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. [3]The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. [4] Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. (Romans 14:1-4)

Paul did not accuse the misinformed as being false prophets/teachers, but rather he rebuked those who passed judgment on those who were mistaken. God can make one stand even with deformity in one's knowledge.

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[a] Or *"We all possess knowledge," as you say*

DIFFERENTIATION OF CONCEPTS

This in-depth study seeks to eliminate the confusion of certain terms that encourages and promotes division within the Churches of Christ as well as other religious fellowships. In not distinguishing between certain terms exercised by the Spirit, many Christians have brought about chaos in the ekklhsia of God and are hopelessly divided into numerous war-like camps. Part of the problem lies with the failure to differentiate adequately between terms employed by various branches within the Churches of Christ. For example, our delinquency in not differentiating between *unity* and *fellowship*, *unity* and *conformity*, *fellowship* and *agreement*, *Gospel* and *doctrine*, and *fellowship* and *endorsement* has contributed to a proliferation of sects within the Churches of Christ. And an inexact use of the above terms continues to uphold the orthodoxy of each divided circle. Thus, when we do not make proper applications of the various phrases employed among many Christians, then this lack of proper differentiation contributes to an abuse of the phrase "false prophets."

By distinguishing between specific key phrases adopted by many, this clarification of understanding will help to clear away the underbrush that prevents Christians from properly interpreting false prophets in the Book of Matthew. By eliminating certain presuppositions, we can approach the text without a lot of excess baggage. The following scenario is a brief analysis of the various clichés employed by many well-meaning Christians to uphold their brand of orthodoxy. This chapter seeks to awaken within every individual a correct understanding of the numerous rigid formulas in order to promote the unity for which Jesus prayed and to correctly identify the false prophets that He warned against.

Unity and Fellowship

Some leaders within the Churches of Christ do not make a distinction between *unity* and *fellowship*. According to some Christians, unity is founded upon fellowship of agreement, not unity created by the Holy Spirit. Many Christians advocate that the "unity of the Spirit" is as a result of fellowship with other believers in the same interpretative community,[605] but this philosophy is not biblical.[606] Unity is that which the Holy Spirit creates, not man. It is the Spirit's unity.[607] In fact, Paul writes, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:3). In other words, Paul says, "spare no effort." To what end? Not to produce a unity, not to create a unity, not to try to arrive at a unity, but to keep the unity. This unity is already in existence. It is unity of all those who believe and respond to the message of redemption expounded in Chapters 1-3 of Ephesians. In other words, fellowship is a fruit of unity, not unity a fruit of fellowship. Carl Ketcherside (1908-1989) is therefore right when he says,

> The Spirit introduces all of the obedient believers into one body and thus forms an active fellowship of all who respond to the Good News. He does this without regard for national or social distinctions. He generates a vital unity of all who are regenerated.[608]

Unity and Conformity

Again, we must differentiate between *unity* and *conformity*. Within the Christian community, we have sought to base a superstructure of religion upon attainment to a certain degree of knowledge and wisdom. The

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[605]Interpretative communities are composed of members who share a particular reading "strategy," or a "set of community assumption." See M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms,* 6th ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1993), 271. See also Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980). I have chosen to use "interpretative community" rather than "interpretive community" as employed by Fish.

[606]For a fuller explanation of these terms, see Dallas Burdette, "The 'Is' and 'Is Not' of Fellowship, *Restoration Review* 15, no. 10 (December 1973): 194-196.

[607]See Dallas Burdette (b. 1934), "The Spirit Makes Us One," *Restoration Review* 16, no. 4 (April 1974): 276-277.

[608]Carl Ketcherside, "The Spirit and Unity," *Mission Messenger* 25, no. 2 (July 1963): 3 [99]. To access all of the issues of *Mission Messenger* [On-Line], go to: www.unity-in-diversity.org

traditional concept of unity is based upon conformity in knowledge and wisdom.[609] But, it goes almost without saying that conformity in the absolute demands equal ability of perception, simultaneous arrival at perfection in knowledge, and universality of wisdom. Alexander Campbell (1788-1866) drove home this point extremely well when he penned:

> It is cruel to excommunicate a man because of the imbecility[610] of his intellect. I have been censured long and often for laying too much stress upon the assent of the understanding; but those who have most acrimoniously[611] censured me, have laid much more stress upon the assent of the mind than I have ever done. I never did, at any time exclude a man from the kingdom of God for a mere imbecility of intellect; or, in other words, because he could not assent to my opinions.[612]

The unity for which Jesus prayed is not external organizational unity. This unity is the unity of persons. It is a fellowship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit with all those who believe. This means that the unity in the **ἐκκλησία** of God involves this fellowship of being. When one is born again, born of the Spirit, or becomes a partaker of the divine nature, this person shares in this unity for which Jesus prayed. God calls everyone into the fellowship of His saints through the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13). There can be no unity at all in our Lord's sense apart from the operation of the Holy Spirit who creates within every believer this new nature. Paul wrote: "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink" (1 Corinthians 12:13). Jürgen Moltmann (b. 1926), German Protestant theologian, once said with his typical pungency:

> The unity of the congregation is a unity in freedom. It must not be confused with unanimity, let alone uniformity in perception, feeling or morals. No one must be regimented, or forced into conformity with conditions prevailing in the church. Everyone must be accepted with his gifts and tasks, his weaknesses and handicaps. This unity is an evangelical unity, not a legal one.[613]

Fellowship and Agreement

Another concept that divides many Christians within the Churches of Christ is that some do not make a separation between the terms *fellowship* and *agreement*. In many camps, if there is no agreement, then there is no fellowship. Many leaders and members throughout numerous Churches of Christ are now realizing that fellowship does not come as a result of our agreement upon matters of opinion and interpretation, but rather our ability to reach agreement upon doctrinal issues comes as a result of fellowship. We are not one in opinion; we are one in Christ. We do not become children of God through study, acquisition of knowledge, learning of the Law, or skill as teachers but through procreation—not through education. Ketcherside is quite correct in observing:

> As God accepted us in our weakness, with mistaken ideas, warped views and unhealthful attitudes, so we must accept each other in the same state or condition. We must not make the kingdom of heaven to consist of our convictions, attitudes or opinions, but of citizens who must be tolerant of each other in such matters, else there can be no kingdom of heaven at all.[614]

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[609]For an insightful article on unity, see Leroy Garrett, "Unity Is God's Gift," *Restoration Review* 15, no. 8 (October 1973): 150-152. See also Carl Ketcherside, "The Spirit and Unity," *Mission Messenger* 25, no. 7 (July 1963): 1-16.

[610]The quality or state of being imbecile or an imbecile.

[611]Caustic, biting in feeling, language, or manner.

[612]Alexander Campbell, "Millennium—No. II," *Millennial Harbinger* 1, no. 4 (Monday, April 5, 1830): 13, 14.

[613]Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991), 343.

[614]Carl Ketcherside, "Contrary to Doctrine," *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 3 (March 1965): 4.

Gospel and Doctrine

Next, we must discriminate between *Gospel* and *doctrine*, a separation drawn by the writers of the New Testament. There is as much difference between the Gospel of Christ and the apostolic doctrine as there is between the sperm from which a child is begotten and the food that he or she eats after birth. Paul knew the difference between the seed from which life came and the daily bread upon which the children fed. He knew the difference between Gospel and doctrine and between faith and knowledge. He knew that the Gospel brought one into being while the doctrine was essential to one's growth and wellbeing; Paul did not make a test of fellowship out of spiritual digestion.[615] Those who confuse chastisement of a child with begettal and cannot distinguish between correction and conception are in a sad predicament.[616]

Fellowship and Endorsement

Once more, we must distinguish between *fellowship* and *endorsement*, which is one of the major problems within the scores of Churches of Christ. Countless believers are under the impression that to have fellowship with one another is to endorse whatever the other person believes, which cannot be true. All Christians are in fellowship with God, but who is so foolish as to believe that God endorses everything a person believes or does? In Paul's letter to the Romans, he writes, "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters" (14:1). Again, "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (15:7). But still, someone may ask, "Are you in fellowship with error?" No, one is in fellowship with individuals. The question posed by many is: "Are you in fellowship with brothers in error?" Our response must be "yes," because that is the only kind of brothers and sisters one knows about. As Alexander Campbell has made clear:

> So long as unity of opinion was regarded as a proper basis of religious union, so long have mankind been distracted by the multiplicity and variety of opinions. To establish what is called a system of orthodox opinions as the bond of union, was, in fact, offering a premium for new diversities in opinion, and for increasing, *ad infinitum*, opinions, sects, and divisions. . . . But the grandeur, sublimity, and beauty of the foundation of hope, and of ecclesiastical or social union, established by the author and founder of Christianity, consisted in this, that THE BELIEF OF ONE FACT, and that upon the best evidence in the world, is all that is requisite, as far as faith goes, to salvation. The belief of this ONE FACT, and submission to ONE INSTITUTION expressive of it, is all that is required of Heaven to admission into the church.[617]

CONCLUSION

The objective of this final chapter is to share with the leaders and members of the various fellowships within Christendom the true nature of unity. Also, this chapter is designed to assist individuals in learning how to determine who is or is not a false teacher so that unity in Jesus may be maintained. If we are going to advocate unity in Jesus, the unity for which our Lord prayed, we must understand certain key terms in order to determine the foundation of unity. Since all Christians are under a mandate to "Be imitators of God . . . and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Ephesians 5:1-2), it is imperative that we work toward making "every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (4:3).

My hypothesis is that when we are taught how to differentiate between certain key phrases, we will arrive at a correct understanding and identification of who the false prophets/teachers are in the Book of Matthew and, thus, maintain the unity for which Jesus prayed. My emphasis in this examination of oneness

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[615]See Dallas Burdette, "Restoring the Biblical Ideal of Preaching" in *Restoration Forum VIII* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 1990), 147-155.

[616]See Carl Ketcherside, "Gospel and Doctrine," *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 2 (February 1965): 1-11. I am indebted to Ketcherside for assisting me in a clearer understanding of the distinction between Gospel and doctrine.

[617]Alexander Campbell, "The Foundation of Hope and of Christian Union," The *Christian Baptist* 1, no. 9 (April 5, 1824): 176, 177.

among God's people has called attention to the "unity of the Spirit" that we are to strive to uphold. Since we are to preserve this unity in all good conscious, a number of cliches were analyzed to help clear away the underbrush or cobwebs in our thinking so that we do not violate our beliefs. This study sought to assist individuals in eradicating fuzzy understanding in order to bring about an answer to Christ's priestly prayer for unity (John 17).

Also, this analysis of unity explored in this book (Old Texts through New Eyes: A Reexamination of Misunderstood Scriptures) demonstrates the utter impossibility of making absolute perfection in knowledge the condition of salvation and fellowship. Since lots of Christians advance the philosophy of unblemished perfection in knowledge of one's party beliefs before they can extend the right hand of fellowship, Paul was called upon to see if this viewpoint is what he taught before he extended friendly intercourse to other devoted saints. To refute faultlessness in knowledge as a prerequisite for association, this in-depth study looked at two congregations (Corinth and Rome) in which differences existed in order to determine from a biblical perspective the mindset to be exercised by us in similar circumstances today. In spite of disagreements within these two fellowships, Paul called for forbearance, not ostracism.

This book is <u>not</u> designed to question the sincerity of those who disagree with the findings set forth in these twenty-two chapters. This last chapter on the study of unity in Jesus is appropriate to conclude this book. The chapters presented in this book have sought to be true to the Word of God. The objective of these writings has been to encourage individuals to become *peacemakers*, not *piecemakers*. In other words, we are to promote peace and harmony, not to fracture the body of Christ into warring factions. Listen to the words of Jesus as He prays for unity among His people:

> My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, [21]that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. [22]I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: [23]I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. (John 17:20-23)

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Old Texts Through New Eyes

Reexamination of
Misunderstood Scriptures

by

Dallas R. Burdette

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Dedication to

First, I dedicate this book to my wife of fifty-two years, and to my children, Rachael Evans, Regina Burdette, Lavone Burdette, Allen Newton, and Donnie Newton. Also, I dedicate this book to my daughters-in-law—Debra Newton (1958-2013), Tara Newton, and Mindy Burdette.

Second, I also dedicate this book to my brother-in-law and sister-in-law, Bobby and Darlene Violette; my son-in-law and daughter, Doug and Rachael Evans; Marvin and Faith Wilson (1946-2014), my brother-in-law and sister; James (1941-2017) and Betty Hagan, and the New Covenant Fellowship (Montgomery, AL.) for their financial sacrifices, without which I could not have published this book.

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FOREWORD

For the past eighteen years it has been my privilege to proofread the writings of Dallas Burdette. He is a prolific writer and writes on a wide variety of biblical and related issues. He has written many sermons, essays, bulletin articles, eulogies, a book, and a doctoral Dissertation. These are all available on his website *freedominchrist.net*. In his first published book, *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (2008), Dallas gives a vivid account of his beginning efforts as a young preacher steeped in a legalistic and dogmatic setting. Early in life, Dallas memorized many Scriptures which he was able to quote eloquently, but without knowing the context for understanding the true meaning of those Scriptures. In time, Dallas began to see the need for developing a faith of his own, not just one handed down from his mentors. He deplored the fractured state of the church. This led to his going back to school at Alabama Christian School of Religion (now Amridge University) where he earned undergraduate and graduate degrees. He later completed the Doctor of Ministry Degree from Erskine Theological Seminary.

Dallas did not go to school to earn degrees, but to learn how to better understand the Word of God. He mastered the Hebrew and Greek languages, read widely from outstanding theologians, studied the art of Hermeneutics, and diligently searched the Scriptures themselves. Dallas has developed an extensive personal library of 30,000 volumes, which he generously shares with Amridge University. Dallas has not been content to buy books to let them gather dust on shelves. He has read, I am sure, more books than anyone I have ever personally known. When Dallas reads a book, you can tell he has been there, as the book is filled with highlighted passages, as well as neatly penciled marginal notes and references. His Bibles receive the same treatment.

Rising around 3:00 O'clock each morning for many years, Dallas spends several hours in Bible Study, either by himself or with friends who want to share in his knowledge. This volume, *Old Texts through New Eyes,* urges students of the Bible everywhere to go back to the Scriptures to learn the meaning of the author from the context. He cautions against finding isolated Scriptures that seem to support what one already believes. The reader of this book should read it in its entirety before passing judgment on it.

James F. Crabtree, Ed. D.
Montgomery, Al
January 15, 2009

INTRODUCTION

The theme of this book is a reexamination of long-held traditions that have divided God's family into warring factions. These twenty-two chapters seek to remove the difficulties of interpreting the Word of God in order that Christians may listen anew to the biblical text. Without thinking, many believers prune Scriptures in order to uphold their presuppositions about what they suppose a particular text teaches. This book is a call to God's children to reevaluate and reinterpret the various understandings handed down through the centuries. This in-depth study of misunderstood Scriptures questions the various readings that have been passed on by generations of interpreters. For many sincere followers of Christ, the "faith of the fathers" has become the watchword for the accepted view of the church. Hopefully, these chapters will remove many obstacles that stand in the way of interpreting the Word of God more faithfully.

If we are to assume responsibility in the way we read the Scriptures, we must be willing to lay aside preconceived ideas and reconsider the various renderings of isolated texts received from earlier generations. We must be willing to rethink and readjust our thinking concerning explanations passed on to the company of the redeemed by godly men and women. Many Christians have been indoctrinated through the churches of their childhood. Regrettably, we have been influenced by outside sources more than by the context of God's written Revelation.

My comments in the various chapters are not designed to slander Christian brothers and sisters or to accuse them of intentionally misinterpreting the Word of God. This book is intended to help believers to go back to the drawing board to see if what they have been taught is what the authors of Holy Scripture meant to convey. Even when we do not see eye-to-eye, we should not accuse one another of deception, or dishonesty. There is a difference between an honest mistake of the heart and rebellion against God. The title of this book, *Old Texts through New Eyes*, is calculated to encourage believers to go back to the text(s) to establish if what they have been taught is in agreement with the author's intentional meaning.

Dallas Burdette, D.Min.
Montgomery, AL
January 15, 2008
November 11, 2020

1

Relevance of the Old Testament

> The most wonderful thing about Christianity, which makes it absolutely unique among the religions of the earth, is, that it has what one may call a reflex history—a history before its actual history commenced—a life before its birth. Its history is composed of two separate periods, each of which is written in a separate volume, but not only do the two make one complete whole, but they stand in such relation to each other that the truth of the one is attested and demonstrated by the testimony of the other. Without the first, the second would be without foundation and unintelligible; without the second, the first would have no corner-stone to keep its sides together, and no headstone, which it absolutely needs to give it a finished and perfect appearance, and so seal it as the workmanship of Him Who is perfect in all His ways.[1]

For many Christians, the Old Testament writings belong to antiquity. As a result of this mindset, many saints no longer study these thirty-nine books. What relevance does the Old Testament have within the Christian community? Is the Old Testament an antiquated book that is no longer significant to Christians? Is it necessary for believers to study the Old Testament, as did the early church? Did the American Restoration Movement initiated by the Campbells reject the Old Testament? What is our attitude toward the Old Testament writings? The most crucial question we, as a body of believers, must consider in seeking a proper decision to this interrogation is: "What did the men who wrote the New Testament books think about the Old Testament?" To set the stage for this investigation, it is necessary to begin with Alexander Campbell (1788-1866).

ALEXANDER CAMPBELL

The question among evangelicals is not whether or not the Old Testament is inspired, but does the Old Testament have any significance for us today? Before considering the attitudes of the Apostles and other inspired men, how do we account for such a wholesale abandonment of the Old Testament within the Churches of Christ? Perhaps, a brief note of Alexander Campbell's beliefs on this subject will help to set the tone for our discussion.[2] For example, the attitudes of those in the Stone/Campbell Movement were influenced by a sermon preached by Alexander Campbell on the Law (1816).[3] It is this sermon that set the stage for the negative attitude within many Churches of Christ. Everett Ferguson (b. 1933) commented upon the significance of this sermon in an address to the Christian Conference, Abilene University, July 1982:

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[1]David Baron, *Rays of Messiah's Glory: Christ in the Old Testament*, originally published in 1886 (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 13.

[2]Campbell was an early leader in the Second Great Awakening of the religious movement that has been referred to as the Restoration.

[3]See, Alexander Campbell, "Sermon on the Law" in C. A. Young, *Historical Documents Advocating Christian Union* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press Publishing Co., Inc., 1985), 217-282.

Alexander Campbell's "Sermon on the Law" has been generally regarded by the historians as a significant episode in the emergence of the Restoration Movement.[4]

Ferguson rightly calls attention to the impact upon the Stone/Campbell Movement, which impact has continued to the present day (2020). Even Alexander Campbell (1788-1866) credited this sermon to the beginning of the American Restoration Movement. As a result of this message on the Law, the Stone/Campbell Restoration Movement was launched. He attributed an eminent significance for his own participation in the Movement to this sermon. The following extract from Campbell may explain the significance of this speech:

> Although precisely thirty years this month since I delivered it, and some two or three years after my union with the Baptist denomination, the intelligent reader will discover in it the elements of things which have characterized all our writings on the subject of modern Christianity from that day to the present . . . . This unfortunate sermon afterward involved me in a seven years' war with some members of said Association, and became a matter of much debate. I found at least, however, that there was a principle at work in the plotters of said crusade, which Stephen assigns as the cause of the misfortunes of Joseph. It is, therefore, highly probable to my mind, that but for the persecution begun on the alleged heresy of this sermon, whether the present reformation had ever been advocated by me.[5]

Campbell stressed that he did not recognize the division of the Law into the three classifications, that is, (**1**) moral, (**2**) ceremonial, and (**3**) judicial. Since he did not recognize these three categorizations, he drew a sharp distinction between the so-called old and new covenants, that is to say, a distinction between the Old Testament books and the New Testament books. Alexander was not alone in this decision. His father also stressed this difference in 1809 in his *Declaration and Address.* Thomas Campbell (1763-1854) uses the following pregnant words to express this distinction:

> That although the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are inseparably connected, making together but one perfect and entire revelation of the Divine will, for the edification and salvation of the Church, and therefore in that respect cannot be separated; yet as to what directly and properly belongs to their immediate object, the New Testament is as perfect a constitution for the worship, discipline, and government of the New Testament Church, and as perfect a rule for the particular duties of its members, as the Old Testament was for the worship, discipline, and government of the Old Testament Church, and the particular duties of its members.[6]

As a result of their philosophy, they set the tenor for the neglect of the Old Testament books. It appears that this neglect for the Old Testament, at least in the Stone/Campbell Restoration Movement, may be due in part to the "Sermon on the Law" and the *Declaration and Address* (1809).[7] Thus, as a result of this emphasis, this concept became a focal point in the theology of the Movement. Part of their theology rests, so it seems, in not properly understanding the negative statements in the writings of Paul that grew out of the "new covenant" that God created through His Son Jesus Christ. Ferguson, Professor of Church History Emeritus at Abilene Christian University, also expresses the central focus of Campbell's position on the Law in his use of Romans and Galatians:

> Campbell in the "Sermon on the Law" works only with Paul, primarily Romans (from which he took his text) and secondarily Galatians and 2 Corinthians. He could have appealed also to Hebrews. One must remember that Paul had a special problem in mind, namely, Judaizers who were binding parts of the law of Moses on Gentile Christians as conditions of salvation, and, in applying Paul's teaching, this context must be kept in mind.[8]

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[4]Everett Ferguson, "Alexander Campbell's 'Sermon on the Law,' A Historical and Theological Examination," *Restoration Quarterly* 29, second quarter 1987: 71.

[5]Alexander Campbell, "Sermon on the Law," *Millennial Harbinger 3 (September 1846): 493.*

[6]See C. S. Young, *Historical Documents Advocating Christian Union* (reprint, Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 1985), 109.

[7]See C. A. Young, *Historical Documents Advocating Christian Union*, 27-216.

[8]Everett Ferguson, "Alexander Campbell's 'Sermon on the Law': A Historical and Theological Examination, *Restoration Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (Second Quarter 1987): 83.

It appears that Alexander Campbell did not consider the negative aspects of the Law in light of the Jewish controversy. How are we to interpret disapproving announcements about the Law? Does opposing testimony about the Law disannul the validity of the Law for us? Was Campbell correct in asserting that there is no distinction among the three classifications of the Law, namely, ceremonial, moral, and civil? Did Campbell examine carefully the positive statements about the Law in the Gospel of Matthew? Some of Campbell's arguments are sufficiently fragile that we are reluctant to let too much rest upon them. Ferguson is perfectly right when he writes, "Campbell does not in the Sermon deal with the rather different estimate of the Law to be found in Matthew."[9]

How do we react to the words of Peter in his First and Second correspondence to the believers in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1 Peter 1:1, 10-12; 2 Peter 1:19-21; see also 2 Timothy 3:10-17 and Matthew 5:17-18). If one desires to understand the Hebrew Scriptures and their relevance for the believer today, I highly recommend the following books by Don Preston: (1) Don K. Preston: *The End of the Law: Torah to Telos, The Passing of the Law of Moses,* Volume 1 (Ardmore, OK: Jadon Management, 2012) (2) Don K. Preston versus Kurt Simmons, *The End of Torah: At the Cross or AD 70: A Debate on When the Mosaic Law Passed Away* (Ardmore, OK: JaDon Management, 2011), and Don K. Preston, *AD 70: A Shadow of the 'Real' End?* (Ardmore, OK: JaDon Management, 2013). Without a knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures, we cannot understand eschatology in the New Covenant writings.

NEW TESTAMENT WRITERS AND THE OLD TESTAMENT

Christians are confronted with two issues concerning the relevance of the Old Testament: (1) Does the Old Testament have authority for believers today? and (2) How does one apply the Old Testament to the Christian community? The most common understanding about the Old Testament is that Christ nailed it to the Cross. In other words, He annulled or abrogated the Law—period. Thus, many saints do not read the Old Testament writings. Many Christians have adopted the position of Adolf Harnack (1851-1930)), German theologian and prominent church historian):

> To reject the Old Testament in the second century was a mistake the church rightly resisted; to retain it in the sixteenth century was a fate from which the Reformation could not escape; but still to preserve it in the nineteenth century as one of the canonical documents of Protestantism is the result of religious and ecclesiastical paralysis.[10]

Harnack's solution was summarily to reject the Old Testament. Even though Christians would not express their disapprobation of the Old Testament with his phraseology, nevertheless, it amounts to practically the same view. But these views were not unique with Harnack. In fact, in the second century, Marcion (c. 160) also rejected entirely the Old Testament from his Bible.[11] Marcion concluded that the God of the Old Testament could not be the God of the New Testament. We find difficulty in squaring Marcion's view with the facts. For instance, over three-fourths of the total Bible is found in the Old Testament. This point alone is sufficient ground to cause us to pause before rejecting this most extensive record of God's Revelation. Everett Ferguson aptly remarks:

> According to one count, there are 239 acknowledged quotations of the OT, introduced by some kind of formula, in the NT; there are 198 quotations not introduced by any formula; there are 1,167 instances of OT passages reworded or directly mentioned. This makes a total of 1,604 NT citations of 1,276 different OT passages. There are many allusions to the OT and borrowings of its phrases. Most of these passages represent a straightforward, literary use of the OT. The NT

[9] Ibid., 83.

[10] Adolf Harnack, *The Christian Church and the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 10, quoted in Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward Rediscovering The Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 14.

[11] Marcion's views are gleaned from Tertullian's five-book refutation, *Against Marcion*—written during the early part of the third century.

uses the old in many ways—for vocabulary and phraseology to express its own ideas, for illustration, for proof of its statements, for moral instruction, for predictions of the new situation. Each of these and other uses could be discussed, but suffice it to say that problems in the NT use of the Old should not obscure the tremendous indebtedness of the later canon to the older, nor should they make that entire usage more problematic than it is.[12]

Beginning with the New Testament, the permanent value of the Old Testament is repeatedly affirmed with explicit statements about its importance. For example, consider the words of Jesus on the Sermon on the Mount:

> Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. [18] I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. [19] Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. [20] For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:17-20)

Again, Paul sets forth the validity of the Old Testament in his epistle to the Romans:

> For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. (Romans 15:4)

Once more, Paul zeros in on the legitimacy of the Old Testament in his letter to the Corinthians:

> These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. (1 Corinthians 10:11)

Or, consider Paul's admonition to Timothy:

> But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, [15]and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. [16]All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, [17] so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:14-17)

These Scripture citations are passages that many Christians have not come to grips with. What does it mean to say, "Whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:19)? How can the sacred writings be useful "for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (1 Timothy 3:16)? How can Jesus and Paul say these things if the Old Testament is no longer relevant? How can we understand eschatological statements in the New Testament without a knowledge of the Old Testament? Again, it is significant that when Paul wrote these words to Timothy, he had reference to the Old Testament. What did Paul mean when he encouraged Timothy to "continue in what you have learned" (2 Timothy 3:14)? The inclusion or exclusion of the Old Testament affects every area of theology. The author of Hebrews specifically wrote that the unity of the Old Testament and the New Testament were to be found in the same God, despite the later arguments of Marcion:

> In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, [2] but **in these <u>last days</u>** he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. (Hebrews 1:1-2)

[12]Everett Ferguson, "Christian Use of the Old Testament," in *The World and Literature of the Old Testament,* ed. John T. Willis (Austin: Sweet Publishing Co., 1979), 373.

How are we to interpret the "last days" without a knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures?[13] Believers during the Old Testament and New Testament eras shared the one and only God.

MORAL, CEREMONIAL, CIVIL

Part of the problem, so it seems to me, is a failure to consider the various aspects of the Law. This distinction is not generally advocated within the Churches of Christ. Why is this so? An answer to the problem lies partly in Alexander Campbell's position. Campbell did not make a distinction between the various aspects of the Law. But was he correct? Are the arguments for moral, ceremonial, or civil legitimate? Walter Kaiser (b. 1933), Professor of Old Testament and President of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts, very succinctly states this problem:

> It must be conceded that the OT contains parts that were indeed temporary and, therefore, time-bound by their very nature (e.g., the ceremonial and ritualistic laws and the once-for-all aspects of its historic episodes). But our contention is that there was also built-in warning with each of these temporary parts that alerted us to the fact that they would become obsolete. Accordingly, all the tabernacle instructions were given as a model, or "pattern" (Exod 25:9, 40; Heb 8:5), of the real, which remained separate from the ceremonial institutions themselves. Nevertheless, behind the temporal and historical lay a principle—a truth meant to outlive its temporal or historical illustration. Too frequently the church has incorrectly assumed that when it had seen the collapse of the temporal institution, it had also thereby witnessed the end of all truth or obligation to any undergirding principles that the institution or historical event illustrated for a former age.[14]

Perusals of the Old Testament Scriptures indicate the temporal nature of certain aspects, but, on the other hand, it is obvious that certain elements have abiding validity. The seven Feast Days in the Hebrew Scriptures were shadows of the coming Messiah. The Scriptures must give its own signals in distinguishing what is temporal, cultural, and historically conditioned. Is the moral Law of God temporal, cultural, or historically conditioned? How do we explain the many references in the New Testament to the Old Testament that speaks of the abiding force of the Law? How do we account for the eternal righteousness of the Law in the messianic age? For example, both Isaiah (739 BC) and Jeremiah (627 BC) speak of the abiding importance of the Law in the Christian age. If this is not the situation, then we wonder what Isaiah and Jeremiah refer to when they spoke of "the law" going forth from Jerusalem and "the law" being written upon the heart? Isaiah tells Israel:

> In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. 3 Many peoples will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." **The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem**. (Isaiah 2:2-3)

Again, Jeremiah also speaks of the Law written on the hearts of God's people in the messianic age:

> "The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. 32 It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to[e] them,[f]" declares the LORD. 33 "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "**I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts**. I will be their God, and they will be my people. (Jeremiah 31:31-33)

Both of these citations are Messianic in nature. How do we reconcile these Scriptures with the current interpretation that the "law was nailed to the cross" in AD 33? Everything that the Hebrew Scriptures foretold

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[13] For an in-depth study of the "last days," see Don K. Preston, *The Last Days Identified* (Ardmore, OK: JaDon Management, 2004). I have read this book several times. I highly recommend this book for anyone who wishes to become acquainted with the Old Testament.

[14] Walter Kaiser, *Toward Rediscovering the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 24-25.

[e] Hebrew; Septuagint and Syriac / *and I turned away from*

[f] Or *was their master*

about the coming of the Messiah had to be fulfilled before the Law with its ceremonial aspects would cease, which occurred in AD 70.. Is it possible that we have misread the statements of Paul in his letters to the Ephesians (2:15-16) and Colossians (2:13-15), which seem to indicate, at least on surface reading, that the Law was nailed to the Cross?

Ephesians 2:14-16	Colossians 2:13-15
For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, [15] by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, [16] and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.	When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature,[b] God made you[c] alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, [14]having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. [15]And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. [D]

What does Paul teach by saying, "the law with its commandments and regulations"? What does Paul mean by announcing, "the law with its commandments and regulations" to the Colossians? We must be careful not to bring our theological heritage, our ecclesiastical traditions, our cultural norms, or our existential concerns to the Epistles as we read them. If our interpretation of these two Scripture citations makes the text mean something God did not intend, then we are abusing the text. Remember that the text serves as a window through which we can glance into a historical period. The following extract from Greg Bahnsen (1948-1995), philosopher and apologist, may explain these two Scripture citations (Ephesians 2:15-16 and Colossians 2:13-15) more clearly:

> The ceremonial observations no longer apply, but their meaning and intention have been eternally validated. The earlier sacrificial ritual was a foreshadow pointing to Christ (Heb. 10:1), and no repetition of a mere shadow can amount to the substantial reality! That which is the foundation of the new economy, in which the outward performance of the ceremonial ritual is not observed, is the obedience of Christ (cf. Heb. 10:8 f.). His obedience makes it no longer necessary for us to obey the ceremonial law in the way which the saints living in the period of expectation did. Ephesians 2:14-16 says that Christ has put the principle of commandments contained in ordinances "out of gear." Christ has broken down the barrier between Jews and Gentiles of which the dividing wall in the temple was the symbol. It should be quite clear that the law which represents enmity and separation between Jews and Gentiles is the ceremonial law, for the moral law does not distinguish between these groups (all men are responsible to the moral law and are condemned under it: Rom. 1-3). It is this ceremonial system which Christ has made ineffective.[15]

In seeking to draw attention to neglected truths, repetition is unavoidable. It is a popular error to suppose that "commandments contained in ordinances" refers to the Law as a whole. But it seems that the stipulations that Paul addresses has to do with "the law of commandments contained in ordinances," that is to say, the principle, order, policy, or system of commandments, not the moral law of God. In other words, the "commandments contained in ordinances" are "decrees," thus, referring to the ceremonial Law. Even in Colossians 2:14, the "ordinances" are the "shadow of things to come" (2:17), and in verses 11 and 16 specific ceremonial illustrations are given.

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[b] Or *your flesh*

[c] Some manuscripts *us*

[15]Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics* (New Jersey: Presbyterian Publishing Co., 1984), 209-10.

SERMON ON THE MOUNT

The Sermon on the Mount is quoted by many Christians to substantiate the abandonment of the Old Testament. Part of the confusion lies within the phrases, "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago" (Matthew 5:21) and "But I tell you" (Matthew 5:22). The Greek text is: **Ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη τοῖς ἀρχαίοις** (*Ēkousate hoti errethē tois archaiois*,[16] "You heard that it was said to the ancients," (Mathew 5:21), and **ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν** (*egō de legō hymin*),[17] "But I say to you" (Matthew 5:22). The phrase, "You heard that it was said to the ancients" is not what the Law said, but rather, the interpretations placed upon the Law by its religious leaders. Jesus sought to correct the erroneous explanations piled upon the Law through the tradition of the elders; He did this by calling attention with the phrase, "But I say to you."

To illustrate the above statement, a cursory look into Jesus' temptation by Satan should clarify the distinction. For example, in the preceding chapter (Matthew 4), Jesus' confrontation with Satan resulted in His quoting the Old Testament. Observe that Jesus, in His response to Satan, did not say, "You heard that it was said to the ancients," but rather, "It is written" (**γέγραπται**, *gegraptai*) [Matthew 4:4]. On the one hand, the first statement (Matthew 5:21) refers to the forefathers, but, on the other hand, the second statement (Matthew 4:4) refers to the *written Revelation* of God through the prophets.

We must learn to reevaluate and reinterpret what has been handed down from generation to generation. Above all, we should never make a decision on what we would like the passage to say. We should seek to be faithful to the way in which the Holy Spirit structured the original text. It is only through a careful reading of the text itself that we can understand the original meaning of the text without reading into it our own ideas drawn from the present. **Proof-texting has no place in exegesis**. Verses are only a part of a larger context. The Scriptures in Ephesians and Colossians must be interpreted in light of the larger context, that is, the whole of God's Revelation. For example, the preceding Scriptures must be interpreted in light of the Sermon on the Mount.

A brief analysis of certain aspects of the Sermon on the Mount will help to shed light on Jesus' viewpoint concerning the validity or worthlessness of the Law. Did Jesus uphold the Law or repudiate the Law? Did Jesus abolish the Law of Moses and give another law that is more demanding than Moses' Law? What can we learn from the Sermon on the Mount concerning Jesus' position toward the Law? Does this Sermon invalidate the Law?

As we move toward the Sermon on the Mount, we must decide, based upon the context, whether or not Jesus gave a new law or simply explained the original intent of His Law as it was revealed to Moses. A lot will depend upon the application that we attach to the words, "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago," and "But I tell you." Was there a contrast between Moses and Jesus' teaching? Perhaps, John R. W. Stott (1921-2011), evangelical Anglican, preacher, teacher, author, and editor—authored fifty books, cogently expresses this best:

> It is widely supposed that Jesus was now inaugurating a new law, and that in doing so he was contradicting and repudiating the old. Nothing could be further from the truth. Indeed, the suggestion that he should do this is antecedently so improbable as to be impossible. Not only would this run counter to His lifelong attitude of reverent assent to Scripture, but He had just asserted that he had not 'come to abolish the law and the prophets . . . but to fulfill them' (v. 17). . . . What Jesus was contradicting here was not Scripture but tradition, not what 'is written' but what 'was said,' not God's word but the false interpretations of it of which the scribes and Pharisees were guilty.[18]

Christ was evaluating not the Older Testamental Law, but rather the pharisaical interpretations placed upon the Law. Jesus affirmed the solemn authority of the Old Testament that not even the least commandment of the entire Old Covenant writings was to be thought or taught as without binding validity today:

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[16]Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, *The Greek New Testament*, (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart) 1983.

[17] Ibid.

[18]John R. W. Stott, *Christ the Controversialist* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), 148.

> Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:19)

Surely, after such a strong declaration, Jesus would not immediately proceed to loosen a commandment of God's Law with "You heard," but "I say" (Matthew 5:21-48). For Jesus, "Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). Accordingly, Jesus reaffirmed elements of the Decalogue in His response to the rich young man: "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 19:18-19).

Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount, speaks of the abiding validity of the Law: "Do not think that I have come to abolish (**καταλῦσαι**, *katalusai*) the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matthew 5:17). Did Jesus give us a New Torah, as suggested by many, and abolish the Old? Is it possible that an individual's prejudice is so deep-seated that one-sidedness negates the possibility of understanding this text? We seldom ask what this text means; rather, we want to know how to answer our opponent. Have we, in general, approached the Bible to prove what we already believe rather than observe what it teaches? These are questions that we must consider in order to be honest with ourselves.

Not to Abolish but to Fulfill

Another stumbling block to many believers is the infinitive phrase, "to fulfill" (**πληρῶσαι**, *plērōsai*). This group of words is an enigma to many believers. Just what is meant by the infinitive utterance, "to fulfill them" (Matthew 5:17)? Also, how should we interpret Christ's statement: "I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished" (**γένηται**, *genētai*, "might become") [Matthew 5:18]. The NIV uses "fulfilled" (**πληρῶσαι**) in verse 17, but "accomplished" (**γένηται**) in verse 18. On the other hand, the KJV employs "fulfilled" in both verses, but is the meaning the same? Jesus's statement about the heaven and earth could not possibly refer to the physical universe, otherwise the Law would still be binding on Christians. The "heaven and earth" had to do with the overthrow of apostate Israel.[19]

Matthew uses two different Greek words for our English word "fulfill" in the KJV. The current interpretation attached to the word "fulfill" is generally understood in the sense of "relaxation" or "invalidation." But is this interpretation correct? Greg Bahnsen seems to have shown conclusively that the Greek words convey distinct meanings:

> The explicit and emphatic affirmation of the law's authority does not allow one to take "fulfillment" in verse 17 as any sort of euphemism for "relaxation" or "invalidation." At the same time in which God promised a new covenant He indicated that, far from being different from the first covenant, the ethical stipulations of that new covenant would be the same as the original law; God says he will write the law on His people's hearts, not change the law.[20]

Jesus says He came to "fulfill" (**πληρῶσαι**, *plērōsai*), not "to abolish" (**καταλῦσαι**, *katalusai*). Failure to distinguish between the two words ("fulfill" and "accomplish") employed by the Holy Spirit can lead to an erroneous understanding of the Sermon on the Mount. Ignorance of these words can lend an air of plausibility to one's interpretation. Just what does this aorist infinitive mean ("to fulfill," **πληρῶσαι**)? For example, does it indicate that Jesus put an end to,[21] replaces,[22] supplements,[23] to actively obey,[24] or enforcing or confirming?[25]

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[19] For an in-depth study of Heaven and Earth, I highly recommend the following books: (1) Don K. Preston, *Who Is This Babylon* (Ardmore, OK: JaDon Management, 2006), and (2) Don K. Preston, *The Elements Shall Melt with Fervent Heat: A Study of 2 Peter 3* (Ardmore, OK: JaDon Management, (2006).

[20] Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 46.

[21] Robert A. Hawkins, "Covenant Relations of the Sermon on the Mount," *Restoration Quarterly* 12 (First Quarter, 1969): 1-9.

[22] W. D. Davies, *Christian Origins and Judaism* (New York: Arno Press, 1973), 56.

The most detailed study of this infinitive phrase is that of Bahnsen. He draws attention to this ("enforcing," or "confirming") neglected aspect of "to fulfill":

> The establishment of God's will as the work of Christ plays an important part in Matthew's Christology; accordingly, Matthew Henry writes that the gospel is not the repeal of the law, but its reestablishment. Jesus says in Matthew 5:17 that he came to confirm and restore the full measure, intent, and purpose of the Older Testamental law. He sees the process of revelation deposited in the Older Testament as finding its validation in Him—its actual embodiment (cf. John 1:17). Jesus' own teaching represents a proclamation of the full implications of the commandments God delivered in the Older Testament in opposition to the legalistic scribal interpretations; His teaching demonstrates that God's law is more exacting and comprehensive than the current shallow and externalistic interpretations would lead people to think. *Pleerroo* should be taken to mean "confirm and restore in full measure." We must not think that the coming of Christ has invalidated the previous law of God, for the "word of the Lord abides forever" (1 Pet. 1:24-25).[26]

Our understanding of the Sermon on the Mount plays a central role in our application of the Old Testament to the Christian era. What is the central focus of Jesus in His Sermon? Is He propounding a "new law," or is He refuting the traditions of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law (scribes)? The context seems to indicate that Jesus addresses the nullifying attitude of the religious leaders toward the Law, not the Law itself. In other words, the leaders of Israel were making the Word of God ineffective through their traditions. In this Sermon, Jesus makes it clear that the model for Christian obedience to God's Law is not Pharisaical legalism, but obedience from the heart.[27] The Law did not pass away until every prophecy concerning Jesus and the end time of the Old Covenant World of Judaism vanished (AD 70).

The religious leaders' behavior excluded them from the kingdom of heaven: "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20). If we manifest this same kind of righteousness exhibited by the religious leaders, we too will not enter the kingdom of heaven. To illustrate the forcefulness of Jesus' teaching about *inward* righteousness versus *outward* righteousness, it will be helpful to reflect upon Jeremiah's graphic portrait of Israel's reliance upon the "temple of the Lord" in contradistinction to proper conduct, which behavior Jesus also addresses in His Sermon on the Mount.

> This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. [4]Do not trust in deceptive words and say, "This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!" [5]If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, [6] if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, [7] then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your forefathers for ever and ever. [8]But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless. [9]" 'Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury,[a] burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, [10] and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, "We are safe"—safe to do all these detestable things? [11]Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 7:3-11)

This same attitude toward God's Law is also reflected in the writings of Isaiah. Listen to God as He addresses the leaders in Israel for their lack of concern for the things that really matter:

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[23]J. Y. Campbell, "Fulfill, Accomplish," in *A Theological Word Book of the Bible*, ed. Alan Richardson (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1962), 87-88.

[24]Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 189-209.

[25]Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 64.

[26]Ibid.

[27]It is in this vein that Paul addresses the believers at Rome: "But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted." (Romans 6:17). The KJV renders this verse: "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you." The Greek text is: **ὑπηκούσατε δὲ ἐκ καρδίας** (*hypēkousate de ek kardias*, "but you obeyed from the heart").

[a] Or *and swear by false gods*

'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?' "Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. [4]Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. [5]Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? [6]"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to **loose** the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? [7]Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter— when you see the naked, to **clothe** him, and **not to turn away** from your own flesh and blood? (Isaiah 58:3-7)

Many of the religious leaders, in Jesus' day, reflected the same mindset that existed in Israel. Their religion consisted in *outward* rituals, but not with *inward* righteousness. The words of Isaiah are very similar to the words of Jesus in His renunciation of the religious leaders in His judgment scene (Matthew 25:31-46). Ultimately, the whole of the Oliver Discourse had its fulfillment in AD 70. This parable of Jesus is an analysis of those condemned in Matthew 23 (seven woes against the leaders of Israel). In the Sermon on the Mount, as Jesus concludes the true interpretation of God's Law against the traditions of men, He warns His disciples with very vivid language about the ethical behavior of the teachers of the Law and Pharisees:

Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. [16] By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? [17]Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. [18]A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. [19]Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. [20]Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. [21]"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 7:15-21)

Within the New Heaven and Earth, God's people are still committed to ethical behavior that gives glory to God. Why must we practice *inward* as well as *outward* righteousness and teach the details of God's Law? Is it not because our righteousness (good works) must include the whole person? Jesus says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37). Even though, as believers in Christ, we are not under Law but grace. We are still to practice ethical behavior since we are the salt and light of the world. In other words, the righteousness of the believer must exceed the *external* righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. What is Jesus' concern? Is it not about Law abuse? Is it not about neglect of the true intent of the Law? In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus goes to the very heart of the matter. In other words, Jesus repudiates the perverse externalistic interpretations of the Pharisees and their exegetical distortions of the Law. Not only were the Pharisees mistaken in this area of the Law, but they were also incorrect in their scheme of justification; the religious leaders sought salvation through works. To state more clearly, the religious leaders not only invalidated the intent of the Law by their disregard for the inward, but they also used the Law as their means of right standing before God.

The Sermon on the Mount zeroes in on the *external* versus the *internal* intent of the Law. For example, this famous Sermon is rounded off, as stated above, with an earnest appeal to beware of false prophets and a petition to put into practice His teachings. The first truth that our Lord Jesus Christ drives home in this Sermon is the authority of the Old Testament (Matthew 5:17-19). This testament remained in force until Jesus returned in AD 70 in which the martyred saints (Revelation 6:9-11; Hebrews 11:13-16) received their promised inheritance. Again, in concluding this Sermon, Jesus sums up the essence of the Law with what is now commonly called the "Golden Rule": "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12).

PAUL'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE LAW

As we contemplate the writings of Paul, we should be conscious that the Holy Spirit used Paul as an instrument to communicate His truths. There can be no contradiction between Paul and other statements of Holy Scripture. It appears, at least on surface reading, that Paul's negative statements about Law depreciate its authority in the life of the believer. For many believers, Paul's diversified "point of view" toward the Law is

one of the most baffling enigmas in biblical studies. At the very center of this problem is a statement of Paul to Christians in Rome: "Christ is the **end of the law** so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes" (Romans 10:4). How do we harmonize this statement of Paul with the statement of Jesus in His Sermon (Matthew 5:17-19)? Heikki Räisänen (1941-1215), Professor of New Testament Exegesis at the University of Helsinki from 1975 to his retirement in 2006, captures this dichotomy of Paul's theology this way:

> Paul has two sets of statements concerning the validity of the law for Christians. According to one set the law has been abrogated once and for all. According to the other the law is still in force, and what it requires is charismatically fulfilled by Christians.[28]

Paul's objection to the Law must be seen in its illegal use, that is to say, the use of the Law as a means of justification, not in its proper use, that is to say, the Law as an expression of God's will for humanity. For Paul, the Law is always explicitly the "law of God." Thus, Paul could express his delight in the Law: "For in my inner being **I delight in God's law**" (Romans 7:22). Again, Paul expresses his abiding status to the law in its relationship to his way of life: "Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my **mind am a slave to God's law**, but in the sinful nature a slave to the law of sin" (Romans 7:25). The one who does not submit himself or herself to God's Law is hostile to God: "the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so" (Romans 8:7). Again, Paul speaks of the abiding validity of the Law as the thing that really counts: "circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. **Keeping God's commands** is what counts" (1 Corinthians 7:19). From these Scriptures, we can see at a glance that Paul delights in God's Law, serves the Law of God in his mind, and subjects himself to the Law of God.

One writer explains our subjection to the Law in these terms: "The nature of the Law is summed up in the statement that the Law is the good will of God. Hence not to be subject to the Law is enmity against God, R. 8:7."[29] Also, Paul's comments to the Corinthians is quite revealing: "To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (**though I am not free from God's law** but am **under [subject] Christ's law**), so as to win those not having the law" (1 Corinthians 9:21). Are we "under law"? Or are we "subject to law"? If we are under Law, then, we are still under condemnation. But what did Paul mean by his statement in 1 Corinthians 9:21? In verse 20 of this same chapter, Paul stresses that the Christian is **not** under law, but in verse 21, Paul appears to contradict what he had just stated. How do we respond properly to this apparent contradiction between the two verses? Perhaps, a parallel chart from the English and Greek text will clarify part of the dilemma:

1 Corinthians 9:20	1 Corinthians 9:21
To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those **under** the law I became like one **under** the law (though I myself am not **under** the law), so as to win those **under** the law.	To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am **under Christ's law**), so as to win those not having the law.

[28]Heikki Raisanen, "Paul's Theological Difficulties with the Law," in *Studia Biblica, 1978: Papers on Paul and Other New Testament Authors, Sixth International Congress on Biblical Studies*, ed. E. A. Livingston (Shefield: University Press, 1980), 305, quoted in Walter Kaiser, *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 308.

[29]Kittel, Gerhard and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), vol. 4, s.v. "The Law in the New Testament," by W. Gutbrod, 1071.

[20]καὶ ἐγενόμην τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις ὡς Ἰουδαῖος, ἵνα Ἰουδαίους κερδήσω· τοῖς **ὑπὸ** νόμον ὡς **ὑπὸ** νόμον, μὴ ὢν αὐτὸς **ὑπὸ** νόμον, ἵνα τοὺς **ὑπὸ** νόμον κερδήσω· [30]	[21]τοῖς ἀνόμοις ὡς ἄνομος, μὴ ὢν ἄνομος θεοῦ ἀλλα **ἔννομος** Χριστοῦ, ἵνα κερδάνω τοὺς ἀνόμους· [31]

In 1 Corinthians 9:20, Paul says "under law" (**ὑπὸ νόμον**, *hypo nomon*) four times; on the other hand, in 1 Corinthians 9:21, Paul does not employ "under law" (**ὑπὸ νόμον**), but rather, "subject to law" (**ἔννομος**, *ennomos*). In the chart above, "under law" is underlined in both the Greek and English text, and, also in 1 Corinthians 9:21, "under law" is underlined in both the Greek and English text. Paul forcefully states that he is "not under law" (v. 20). If this is so, and it is, we wonder why he would say that he was "under Christ's law" in the next verse (v. 21). In verse 21, Paul does not write "under law" (**ὑπὸ νόμον**), but "**subject** to Christ's law" (**ἔννομος**). No Christian is "under law," but every Christian is "subject to law" under Christ or "within law to Christ." Again, Paul says, "I am not free from God's law" (**ἄνομος θεοῦ**, *anomos theou*) but "within law to Christ" (**ἔννομος Χριστοῦ**, *ennomos Christou*).[32] There is no contradiction between these two verses. Did Paul ever consider himself without Law to God?

Paul's negative statements about Law concern the use of the Law as a means of justification, that is to say, an illegal use of the Law. Whenever we resort to the Law (any law for that matter—old or new) to justify our standing before God, then, we are using the Law in a way that God never intended. Paul calls attention to a righteousness "from God" through faith, not Law: "But now a righteousness **from God**, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness **from God** comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe" (Romans 3:21-22). The religious leaders of Israel were seeking righteousness by Law rather than by faith. Thus, Paul nails the coffin shut, as it were, for those who rely upon Law as the means of justification: "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin" (Romans 3:20). It is in this vein that John Murray (1839-1912) explains:

> The person who is 'under law' in the sense of Rom. vi. 14 is in bondage to sin in its guilt, defilement, and power. But this was not the consequence of being under the Mosaic economy during the period from Moses to Christ. Nor is 'under law', in this sense, to be confused with a similar term as it applies to a believer in Christ (1 Cor. ix. 21). Of the same force as 'under law', in this depreciatory sense is the expression 'of law' (Rom. iv. 14; Gal. 3.18, iii.16, iii. 2, 5, 10) refers to the same notion. 'apart from works of law' (Rom. Iii.21), he means a righteousness apart from works of law and therefore antithetical to a works-righteousness. When he says that we have been put to death to the law and discharged from the law (Rom. vii.4, 6), he refers to the breaking of that bond that binds us to the law as the way of acceptance with God (cf. Also Gal. ii.9). Law as law, as commandment requiring obedience and pronouncing its curse upon all transgression, does not have any potency or provision for the justification of the ungodly. The contrast between law-righteousness, which is our own righteousness, and the righteousness of God provided in Christ is the contrast between human merit and the gospel of grace (cf. Rom. x.3; Gal. ii.21, v. 4; Phil. iii.9). Paul's polemic in the epistles to the Romans and Galatians is concerned with that antithesis.[33]

Even though justification is by faith in Jesus, nevertheless, Paul submits the following question to cause reflection upon the Law's relevancy in the life of every believer: "Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law" (Romans 3:31). The written Law is an expression of God's righteousness. Again, Paul reinforces this truth when he writes: "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law" (Romans 13:8). In other words, Paul is

[30]Black, Matthew, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger, and Allen Wikgren. *The Greek New Testament*. Federal Republic of Germany: United Bible Societies, 1997, c1982.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Ibid., 1087-1088.

[33]John Murray, "Law," in *The New Bible Dictionary***,** ed. J. J. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 722.

saying that love expresses itself in obedience to the commandments. Immediately upon his explanation that love is the fulfillment of the Law, he pens:

> The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet,"[a] and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbor as yourself."[b] 10 Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. (Romans 13:9-10)

JAMES' ATTITUDE TOWARD THE LAW

Just a perusal of the Book of James reveals the relevancy of the Law in our lives. No New Testament writer is more zealous for the fruits that accompany faith than James, our Lord's brother. In fact, James speaks of the Law as "the perfect law that gives freedom" (James 1:25). According to James, every believer who continues to look "intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:25). Not only does James call the Law "the perfect law," but he also speaks of it as the "royal law" (James 2:8). Is James talking about the Law itself? Listen to James as he explains his "royal law":

> If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself,"[a] you are doing right. 9 But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. 11 For he who said, "Do not commit adultery,"[b] also said, "Do not murder."[c] If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker. (James 2:8-11)

Again, James calls attention to the teaching that the Law also judges our relationship to fellow believers: "Brothers, do not slander one another. **Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it.** When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it" (James 4:11). Why such reliance upon the Law? Does James' dependence upon the Law reflect the words of Jesus—his Lord and brother in the flesh (Matthew 5:17-20)? Again, why such admonitions? Is it not that we are to be holy in our manner of life? The Law reflects the character of God. It is for this reason that Paul writes, "the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good" (Romans 7:12).

PETER'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE LAW

Peter also echoes upon the character of God in the Old Testament and appeals to the Old Testament writings for right behavior: "But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written (**γέγραπται**, *gegraptai*): '**Be holy, because I am holy**'" (1 Peter 1:15-16). This citation is taken from Leviticus: "The LORD said to Moses, 'Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy'" (Leviticus 19:2). It is also significant that the Hebrew writer concludes his Epistle with a reference to the Old Testament:

> Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. 5 Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you."[a]6 So we say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?"[b] (Hebrews 13:4-6)

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[a] Exodus 20:13-15, 17; Deut. 5:17-19, 21
[b] Lev. 19:18
[a] Lev. 19:18
[b] Exodus 20:14; Deut. 5:18
[c] Exodus 20:13; Deut. 5:17
[a] Deut. 31:6
[b] Psalm 118:6, 7

This writer (Hebrews) cites two Old Testament passages (Joshua 1:5 and Psalms 118:6) to illustrate the presence and help of God. We must be free from the love of money and be content with what we have. We need nothing more because we always have the presence and help of God. Consider the following citations or comparisons of the above two Scriptures:

Joshua 1:5	Psalms 118:6
No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you.	The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?

JOHN'S ATTITUDE TOWARD THE LAW

For us to be relieved from the demands of the Law would contradict our relationship to God, which grace establishes. **Salvation is freedom from sin, not freedom to commit sin**. As Christians, we have respect and love for God's Law. We are now servants of righteousness. We are no longer servants of sin. We are concerned about God's Law. John puts it this way: "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4). Again, John goes right to the heart of commandment keeping:

> The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But if anyone obeys his word, God's love[c] is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: 6 Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. (1 John 2:4-6)

CONCLUSION

The principle concern of this study is to set forth a brief summary of the various views advocated toward the relevancy of the Old Testament. Many scholars deny the Law any significance since we are under grace, not under Law. On the other hand, we find an equal number of scholars who appeal to the Old Testament as authoritative and relevant. Generally, the negative arguments are based upon negative statements of Paul—statements not viewed in context. It appears that expositors who repudiate the Old Testament fail to understand the emphasis of Paul in refuting the Judaizers' use of the Law as a means of right standing before God. **We must never use the Law as a means of justification.** On the other hand, we should employ the Law to assist us in progressive sanctification, that is to say, holiness in our walk with God. A perusal of the teachings of Jesus, Paul, James, Peter, and John advance the weight of the Old Testament for the believer.

It is imperative that we study the Hebrew Scriptures. Without a sound foundation of the Old Testament, we will fail to interpret numerous eschatological statements found in the New Testament. A knowledge of the Old Testament is essential to interpret correctly the Book of Revelation as well as many of books in the New Testament writings. Again, in conclusion, it is worthy of note to call attention to the negative statements about the Law in the Pauline Epistles. Paul's negative statements do not relate to the authority or relevance of the Old Testament, but rather, to justification. Men and women, says Paul, cannot be justified by Law:

> Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. 20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. **But now** a **righteousness from God**, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22This **righteousness from God** comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. 25God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement,[a] through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the

[c] Or *word, love for God*

[a] 25Or *as the one who would turn aside his wrath, taking away sin*

sins committed beforehand unpunished— [26] he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:19-26)

God is the one who justifies; Law can never justify. The Law **shuts** our mouths: "Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, **through the law we become conscious of sin**" (Romans 3:19-20). We could also say that through the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms that we understand the New Testament writings concerning eschatology. When we are in Jesus Messiah, then we can say with assurance: "Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies" (Romans 8:33). Paul reinforces this thought with the statement: "Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes" (Romans 10:4). We are dead to the Law, but the Law is not dead. Even though Paul painted a rather dismal picture of those under Law, nevertheless, he spoke of a righteousness that is by faith, not Law: "But now a righteousness **from God**, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness **from God** comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe" (Romans 3:21-22).[34] Remember the final words of Paul to Timothy about the Old Testament:

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, [15] and **how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus**. [16] All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for **teaching**, **rebuking**, **correcting** and **training** in righteousness, [17] so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:14-17)

[34] For an in-depth study of this "righteousness from God," see Dallas Burdette, "Overview of Romans," in Dallas Burdette, *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood, FL: Xulon, 2008), 249-281.

2

A Literary Analysis Of the Gospel of Matthew

> Any hermeneutic that locates revelation primarily in the past is inevitably pessimistic. The very passing of time, which is definitive of history, distances us from the significant event and places us at an ever-greater disadvantage. The sentiment that accompanies such a perspective is the suspicion that we are missing something: if only we had been there, we would understand better. The hermeneutic that undergirds narrative criticism challenges this prejudice. Revelation is given through the story, which remains with us today. We are, in fact, in a privileged position, for the story interprets the events for us in ways that we might never have grasped if we had simply been there to witness them transpire in history.[35]

Chapter 2 sets the stage for subsequent chapters on how to correctly apply the principles of interpretation of Scripture in order to prevent division and destruction among God's people. This literary analysis of the Gospel of Matthew sets forth basic principles of interpretation. This study in Matthew's Gospel focuses upon how to determine who the "false prophets" are within the context of Jesus' use of the phrase. In order to arrive at a correct understanding, we need to examine the Book as a whole so as to determine who the false prophets are that Jesus refers to in His various discourses as reported by Matthew. The immediate context as well as the remote context (the book) is consulted to arrive at an accurate conception of the "false prophets" in Matthew's account of Jesus' ministry. Christians frequently do piece-meal interpretation and then build their theology on an isolated Scripture—a passage secluded from its framework. Matthew 7:15 is one of the most misunderstood Scriptures within the Christian community.

LITERARY CRITICISM

This chapter details the three major divisions in the Gospel of Matthew in order to understand more clearly as to whom the false prophets are about whom Jesus warns His disciples. The phrase "false prophet" is employed from Matthew's Gospel in order to justify separation from other believers when viewpoints do not often agree. To accomplish this objective of identification of the false prophets, literary techniques are employed to capture the conflict that envelops the whole of Matthew's Gospel. This overall analysis of the principles of literary interpretation should assist us in our understanding of this unique phrase by Jesus. The identity of Jesus is the focal point of all three major sections in Matthew. This study draws attention to the various viewpoints espoused by God, and the civil/religious leaders in Israel. This critical analysis reveals that unethical behavior and a denial that Jesus is the Son of God calls forth the epithet "false prophets."

[35]Mark Allen Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 99.

Since God's Revelation is given in story form to us, this form of communication enables us to arrive at a more precise identification of false prophets in the Gospel of Matthew. We can read the narrative by Matthew and follow the plot for an accurate description of the misleading instructors.[36] This detailed study is an overview of the Gospel from a literary perspective. This literary exploration explores the principles of exposition through the means of narrative investigation. Literary criticism controls the looseness that is frequently employed in the investigation of a solitary phrase.[37]

Literary criticism recognizes that a single text or multiple texts are a part of a larger whole. The three occurrences of "false prophets" in the Gospel of Matthew[38] can be properly exegeted when they are considered fragments of a continuous composition. John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay have correctly stated: "In attempting to understand a particular text, the exegete should seek to see the text within the structure of the major context as well as within the structure of the sub-units."[39] When we bring out questions about the literary placement of certain passages, we are able to arrive at certain conclusions that might otherwise be missed. Literary analysis of a text helps us to focus more closely upon the individual texts. This form of interpretation assists us in grasping more fully the intent of the author.

This philosophy of interpretation dealing with the complete text is thoroughly worked out by Mark Allen Powell in his study guide on narrative criticism.[40] He points out, justly so, that "Literary criticism focuses on the finished form of the text."[41] Again, Powell states the matter even more firmly, "Literary analysis does not dissect, or dismember, the text but discerns the connecting threads that hold it together."[42] Dissecting the text from its context contributes often times to an improper application of the text. The goal of literary criticism is to read the text as the *implied reader*[43] read the text.

The Implied Reader

The *implied reader* may know things that are not in the text. On the other hand, the *real reader* frequently consults outside reading in order to understand the text more fully.[44] Seymour Chatman in drawing attention to the meaning of the *implied reader* puts it this way: "The counterpart of the implied author is the *implied reader*—not the flesh-and-bones you or I sitting in our living rooms reading the book, but the audience

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[36]See Ronald David Witherup, "The Cross of Jesus: A Literary-Critical Study of Matthew 27," (Ph. D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1985), 56, where he comments on an important methodology of literary criticism.

> Contemporary literary criticism accepts the object of its study as literature in and of itself, not as a means to an end. As opposed to the other Biblical criticisms, there is no intention to look behind the text to discern history or sources. Literary criticism looks <u>at</u> a text, rather than <u>through</u> it. To use Murray Krieger's apt metaphor, the text is to be viewed not as a "window" through which one looks to discern what is on the other side; rather, it is a "Mirror" and the meaning of the text is thus on "this side" of the reading experience.

[37] Ibid., 95.

[38]Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24.

[39]John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook* (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1987), 75.

[40]Powell, *Criticism, 1-10.*

[41]Ibid., 7.

[42]Ibid.

[43]See M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 6th ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1993), 269, where he says,

> Iser distinguishes between the "implied reader," who is established by the text itself as one who will respond in specific ways to the "response-inviting structures" of the text, and the "actual reader," whose responses are inevitably colored by his or her accumulated private experiences.

[44]For an example of this distinction, see Dallas Burdette, "Passover Traditions in the Time of Christ," in *From Legalism to Freedom*, 181-195. This study concerning the Passover sets forth an example of the distinction between the *real reader* and the *implied reader*. The *real reader* goes to outside sources to discover what the *implied reader* already knew about the Passover traditions in the first century through first-hand knowledge. See also Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism*, 19-21.

presupposed by the narrative itself."[45] Narrative criticism helps to narrow the gap between the *real reader* and the *implied reader*.[46] This chapter is a narrative construction of Matthew's Gospel in order to try to comprehend as clearly as possible the discernment of the *implied reader* (original reader) as to who the false prophets are in the Gospel of Matthew.

Plot

As we begin to read the narrative penned by Matthew, we are immediately made aware that there is a plot. Whenever we have a plot, we have a story.[47] Chatman defines story as consisting of two parts—story and discourse.[48] For Chatman story has to do with a chain of events (actions, happenings) whereas discourse is the means by which the story (content) is communicated.[49] Jack Kingsbury, adopting the definition of Chatman, applies this concept to the story of Matthew's narrative by demonstrating that "The 'story' of Matthew is of the life of Jesus from conception and birth to death and resurrection."[50] On the other hand, Kingsbury in his differentiation between story and discourse says, "The 'discourse' of Matthew is the means whereby this story of Jesus' life is told."[51] In other words, the story is *what* is told whereas discourse is *how* the story is told.[52] E. M. Forster as early as 1927 says, "a story is a narrative of events arranged in time sequence."[53] This arrangement of events is self-evident when we look at the Gospel of Matthew as story.

Chatman also describes a story as consisting of three parts—events, characters, and settings.[54] The events are the strings of movements that stretch out from the beginning to the end of the story. In other words, the events cover the whole distance of the report. One dominant trait in Matthew is the reporting of conflict (events) between Jesus and the religious leaders. It is these events that comprise the plot, or flow, of the narration. An understanding of plot can deepen our understanding of who the false prophets were in the Gospel of Matthew. Morner and Rausch thoughtfully define plot as

> The careful arrangement by an author of INCIDENTS in a NARRATIVE to achieve a desired effect. Plot is more than simply the series of happenings in a literary work. It is the result of the writer's deliberate selection of interrelated actions (what happens) and choice of arrangement (the order of happening) in presenting and resolving a CONFLICT.[55]

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[45]Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 149-150; Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1974); David Robert Bauer, "The Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Literary-Critical Examination," (Ph. D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1985), 24-26; Dorothy Jean Weaver, "The Missionary Discourse in the Gospel of Matthew: A Literary Critical Analysis," (Ph. D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1987), 66.

[46]See W. K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1982), where he counsels Christians not to reject literary criticism.

> Religious thinkers should be sympathetic to criticism because it is a branch of philosophy; it is an effort to get at certain truths about signs, knowledge, and reality. If these remarks seem at all platitudinous, let me add that I have taken the trouble to make them because it seems to me possible for the thought and scholarship of religious persons (especially in America today) to be too far sold in the cultivation of certain merely historical, informational, and neutral techniques. This may have been for a time a necessary phase of competition with secular science and secular education. But there is no reason why Christians should be the last (or even be slow) to transcend the limitations of such knowledge, to outgrow pedantic misconceptions and participate in literary philosophy.

[47]See Witherup, " Cross of Jesus," 120, 139.

[48]Chatman, *Story*, 19-27.

[49]Ibid., 19.

[50]Jack Kingsbury, *Matthew As Story*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 3.

[51]Ibid.

[52]See also Bauer, "The Cross of Jesus," 62.

[53]E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1927), 30.

[54]Chatman, *Story*, 19, 26.

[55]Kathleen Morner and Ralph Rausch, "Plot" in *NTC's Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Chicago: NTC/Contemporary Publishing Company, 1997), 167.

We cannot read Matthew's story[56] and not observe his choice of arrangements in presenting his story of conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders. Matthew foreshadows the hostility between Jesus and the leaders of Israel in his first section (1:1—4:16). Next, he describes indirect collision (4:17—11:1). Then he pictures direct confrontation (11:2-16:20); and, finally the friction is resolved in the crucifixion of Jesus (16:21—28:20). An understanding of plot (sequence of events) facilitates comprehension of the whole. There is a difference between story and plot. Forster's comments on this distinction are worthy of citation.

> We have defined a story as a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence. A plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality. "The king died and then the queen died" is a story. "The king died, and then the queen died of grief" is a plot. The time-sequence is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it.[57]

In the development of plot, we recognize the translating of characters into action.[58] In the plot of Matthew's story, conflict exists between two opposing forces—Jesus and the religious leaders. Matthew's plot structure begins with exposition (important background information), and then develops the build-up of tension between opposing forces and finally the plot arrangement reaches a climax in its resolution of the conflict—the death of Jesus.[59] In narrative writing, there is a beginning, middle, and end to plot.[60]

Point of View

In examining plot in Matthew's story, we are immediately confronted with various evaluative points of view about the identity of Jesus.[61] "The notion of point of view is a pervasive one in narrative criticism," says Powell.[62] There is a contrast in the Book of Matthew between God's point of view and the religious leaders' point of view concerning the identity of Jesus. We also observe other points of view concerning the crowds. If our point of view does not harmonize with God's point of view as revealed in Matthew 3:17 and 17:5, then we are not thinking the things of God, but rather the things of men (16:23).[63]

As we peruse the Book of Matthew, we cannot help but observe various points-of-view about Jesus?[64] We encounter Matthew's point of view about Jesus in the prologue (Chapters 1 and 2). Also in the prologue, Matthew gives a foretaste of the religious leaders' point-of-view about Jesus.[65] Following the baptism of Jesus, Matthew reveals God's point-of-view about who Jesus really is. Throughout the Gospel of Matthew, we are confronted over and over with various points of view as to who Jesus really is.

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[56]See Dorothy Jean Weaver, "The Missionary Discourse in the Gospel of Matthew: A Literary Critical Analysis," (Ph. D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1987), 31, where she summarizes quite succinctly the story, plot and setting: "This story can be viewed in terms of three basic elements: characters (the actors in the story), plot (the sequence of events within the story), and setting (the designated location or surroundings within which any given event of the story takes place)."

[57]Forster, Novel, 86.

[58]See Bauer, "Structure," 26, where he comments on "plot":

> Another aspect of literary criticism which has received a great deal of attention lately is the "plot." Put succinctly, the plot is the arrangement of incidents within the narrative, considered in light of their relations to one another. A distinction is usually made between the arrangement of events in the narrative time and that in the story time to which the narrative refers. The narrative may include such devices as flash back or foreshadowing, forcing the readers to place the incidents thus described in their proper temporal position within the story.

[59]See also Morner and Rausch, *NTC's Dictionary*, 168.

[60]Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Story*, 43.

[61]Ibid., 34.

[62]Powell, *Criticism*, 23; See also Weaver, "Discourse," 67.

[63]For an excellent treatment of the various evaluative points of view in Matthew's Gospel, see Kingsbury, S*tory*, 1988), 33-37; Morner and Rausch, *NTC's Dictionary*, "Point of View," 170-171; M. H. Abrams, "Point of View," *Literary Terms*, 165-169. See also Mark Allen Powell, "The Religious Leaders in Matthew: A Literary-Critical Approach," (Ph., D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1988), 176-184.

[64]See Witherup, "Cross of Jesus," 76-86; Weaver, "Discourse," 68-100; Kingsbury, *Story*, 33-42.

[65]Powell, "Leaders," 184.

As we move from the disciples to the Jewish crowds and then to the religious leaders, we observe the degree to which each group deviates from thinking the things of God to thinking the things of men. Matthew records one such example in which one of the disciples did not think the things of God. For instance, he informs his readers that as Jesus begins His journey to Jerusalem to die for the sins of humanity that He rebukes Peter for not having in mind the thinking of God. Matthew records this encounter: "Jesus turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men'" (16:23). In other words, Peter did not think the things of God concerning the necessity of the Atonement, but rather the things of men in his seeking to prevent God's purpose for the salvation of men and women through the sacrificial offering of Jesus for the sins of the world.

One purpose of this chapter is to investigate the various viewpoints set forth by the numerous characters in the Gospel of Matthew to see how well the characters' points of view coincides with that of God's. In order to accomplish this target, it is necessary to cover briefly the structure of Matthew's history of salvation. This chapter will reveal that the religious leaders' point of view was in direct opposition to God's point of view. This rejection of God's point of view by the leaders of Israel called forth from Jesus the epithet—false prophets.

THE STRUCTURE OF MATTHEW'S HISTORY OF SALVATION

Three Major Divisions in Matthew

There are three broad segments in Matthew's gospel.[66] The three segments are: (1) The unveiling of Jesus' identity [1:1—4:16];[67] (2) The ministry of Jesus to Israel and Israel's repudiation of Jesus [4:17—16:20];[68] and (3) The pilgrimage of Jesus to Jerusalem, which also includes an account of His crucifixion, burial, and resurrection [16:21—28:20].[69] It appears that Matthew employed a formula to signal the beginning of each new part. For example, he says, following the end of segment one: "From that time on Jesus began to preach" (4:17) and with the beginning of section three: "From that time on Jesus began to explain" (16:21). Did Matthew intend to call attention to important turns in his story? If so, this gives rise to the above outline.[70]

It seems appropriate to analyze the Book of Matthew from the perspective of three major divisions to more clearly grasp the development of conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders. Even if this division is not the real intent of Matthew, nevertheless, this three-part partition can still assist us in understanding the Word of God more clearly. As we advance through the three groupings, it will become apparent that there is progression in the story of Jesus. In the first part (1:1—4:16), Matthew foreshadows[71] the conflict with the religious leaders who are also called false prophets in 7:15. In Part Two (4:17—16:20) the conflict with the religious leaders begin, but with Part Three (16:21—28:20) the confrontation with the religious leaders escalates to the point of their putting Him to death (26:57-67; 27:32-55).[72]

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[66]I am indebted to Kingsbury's book, *Matthew as Story,* for calling my attention to this threefold structure. This overview of Matthew's structure follows the development by Kingsbury. See also Powell, "Leaders," 39-41; Witherup, "Cross of Jesus," 112-150; David Robert Bauer, "The Structure of Matthew's Gospel: A Literary-Critical Examination," (Ph. D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1985).

[67]Kingsbury, *Story*, 43-58.

[68]This second section may be further divided into two subdivisions: (1) Ministry of Jesus to Israel [4:17-11:1]; and (2) Israel's repudiation of Jesus [11:2-16:20]; Witherup, The Cross of Jesus, 34; Bauer, "Structure," 185.

[69]Kingsbury, *Story*, 77-93.

[70]For an analysis of the structure of Matthew, see Witherup, "Cross of Jesus," 142, 152.

[71]Witherup, "Cross of Jesus," 89.

[72]Weaver, "Discourse," 62.

FIRST MAJOR SECTION

1:1—4:16

The aim of this first section is to "present Jesus to the reader so that we will know throughout the rest of the story precisely who Jesus is."[73] As we approach this first section (1:1—4:16), there does appear to be literary unity from beginning to end. For example, consider the following scenario that testifies to the unity of 1:1—4:16. For instance, the formula quotation in Matthew 2:23 is linked to the formula quotation in 4:12-16 through the naming of the geographical location of His ministry:

- And he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: "He will be called a Nazarene." (2:23)

- When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee. [13]Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali— [14] to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah: [15]"Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, the way to the sea, along the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— [16]the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned."[a] (4:12-16)

Again, Matthew (2:15) informs us that Joseph took Jesus to Egypt,

- Where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son." (2:15)

These three citations (2:23; 4:12-16; 2:15) along with the baptismal declaration (3:17) declare the unity of 1:1-4:16. The baptismal declaration reads: "And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'" This passage (3:17) is foreshadowed by the prophecy in 2:15. Also, 4:12-16 is reflective of the fulfillment prediction in 2:23. The identity of Jesus also acts as glue that gives cohesion to Part One. This section (1:1—4:16) also foreshadows the false prophets that Jesus addresses in His Sermon on the Mount as well as His eschatological discourse (Chapter 24).

THE IDENTITY OF JESUS

God's Evaluative Point of View

In this first section (1:1-4:16), Matthew unveils Jesus' identity. In this division, we find the most climatic statement regarding the identity of Jesus. The ultimate declaration as to the identity of Jesus is from God in the baptismal scene of Jesus: "And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased'" (3:17). In this baptismal pericope, God personally enters the world of Matthew's story and declares Jesus to be His Son in whom He is pleased.[74] God in making this declaration expresses His evaluative point of view concerning Jesus' real identity, that is to say, how He thinks about Jesus. For us to trace properly the flow of Matthew's story from beginning to end, we must consider the first part as a major contribution to the unfolding of the Jesus drama. Before developing God's evaluative point of view in more detail, it will be helpful to consider other points of view about Jesus in this first segment.

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[73]Kingsbury, *Story*, 98.

[a] Isaiah 9:1, 2

[74]For an excellent commentary on God entering the world as actor, see Weaver, "Discourse," 90; Witherup, "Cross of Jesus," 124.

Matthew's Evaluative Point of View

Matthew's point of view is that Jesus is the Son of God.[75] For example, in the prologue, Matthew sets the tone for the development of the real identity of Jesus—Jesus is the Son of God. To illustrate, Matthew, after revealing the angel's announcement of the birth of Jesus, adds his own comments, which reveals his own point of view:

> She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus,[a] because he will save his people from their sins."
> [22] All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: [23] "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"[b]—which means, "God with us." (1:21-23)

Matthew reveals his point of view about Jesus by citing the virgin birth prophecy (Isaiah 7:14). This reference also discloses God's hand in the scheme of redemption for sinful men and women. Since Jesus is the supreme player, Matthew immediately advances the Davidic and Messiah-King claims through the genealogy (Matthew 1:1-17). Matthew lets us know that God has guided the whole of Israel's history in the promises He made to Abraham (Genesis 17:1-9)[76] and David (Isaiah 11:1). Matthew informs his readers that even in the face of the Babylonian captivity (Matthew 1:12) God was still in control. Since Jesus as the Messiah is the heir of Abraham and David, Matthew begins his Gospel by calling attention to this truth: "A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham" (1:1). It is also significant that in this genealogy that Matthew combines the name Jesus with the name Christ. The name Jesus Christ (1:1, 21) also makes known God's point of view as well as Matthew's point of view.

The name Jesus (**Ἰησοῦς**, *Iēsous*) is descriptive of His mission. On the other hand, the term Christ (Χριστός, Cristos) is descriptive of His being appointed by the Father. Since Matthew gives the personal name of the Messiah as Jesus (1:16), the reader should give special attention to the importance of this name. This name assigned to Jesus is of heavenly origin. Matthew informs us that an angel of God instructed Joseph to name Him Jesus (1:20-21). Matthew chronicles Joseph's response to the angel: "He gave him the name Jesus" (1:25). Matthew sounds the identity of Jesus through the genealogy of names and the titles placed at the beginning of his account.

In the name Jesus, we discover that God is active in Him for the salvation of humanity. Matthew not only refers to the one born in Bethlehem as Jesus, but he also adds the title Christ for further identification. Christ is the title of Jesus, not his name. Among all the titles assigned to Jesus, Christ is the most general. Matthew not only affirms in 1:1 that Jesus is the Christ (ὁ Χριστός, Jo Cristos), or Messiah—a confession that Peter will later make (16:16)—but also that he is "Son of David" and "Son of Abraham."

Matthew includes the genealogy to assert that God has guided the whole of Israel's history so that it might culminate in the birth of Jesus. For Matthew, Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of David, and the Son of Abraham. Thus, Matthew in this first section (1:1-4:16) sets forth his evaluative point of view as to who Jesus really is. From the beginning of his Gospel, Matthew informs us that Jesus is Christ, and, then concludes the final chapter of Christ's rejection of Israel's leaders by recording Pilate's question to the chief priest and elders (27:20): '"What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?', Pilate asked" (27:22). Even the high priest in Jesus' final hours asked Him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son

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[75] See Kingsbury, *Story*, 35.

[a] *Jesus* is the Greek form of *Joshua*, which means *the LORD saves.*

[b] Isaiah 7:14

[76] When Abram was ninety nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers." Abram fell face down, and God said to him, "As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.'"(Genesis 17:1-8)

of God" (26:63). Did Jesus refuse to answer the high priest because He knew that his question was not sincere? Observe the contrast between the Magi and the religious leaders—the Magi worshipped Him, but the religious leaders cried out: "Crucify him!" (27:22).

The Magi's Evaluative Point of View about Jesus

Following the birth of Jesus, the Magi from the East arrived in Jerusalem and inquired about Him who is "born King of the Jews" (2:2). This phrase, "king of the Jews," sets forth the evaluative point of view of the Magi concerning Jesus' identity.[77] In fact, the rest of 2:2 reads: "We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him." Immediately, in Matthew's story, we quickly observe the contrast between Herod and the Magi. The Magi's evaluative point of view is in harmony with God's evaluative point of view. Matthew begins his Gospel with a reference to Jesus as "king of the Jews" and concludes the passion narrative with a reference to Jesus as the "king of the Jews" (27:37).

When Jesus was brought before Pilate, he inquired of Him to tell him if he were the "king of the Jews." Matthew records Pilate's question and Jesus' answer: "Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' 'Yes, it is as you say,' Jesus replied" (27:11). Jesus' response reinforces the response of the Magi. Again, in the closing scene of Jesus' crucifixion, one finds this name over the cross: "Above his head they placed the written charge against him: THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS" (27:37).

Herod and the Religious Leaders' Point of View

Herod's evaluative point of view is not in harmony with God's. To illustrate Herod's point of view, it is necessary to turn to Matthew's prologue to observe his actions about learning of the birth of Jesus. Matthew says, "When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. Get up, he said, take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill Him" (2:13). Herod and the religious leaders are closely tied together in this story. Matthew sets the stage for the further development of the animosity of the leaders against Jesus.

In this First Section (1:1—4:16), Matthew foreshadows the rejection of Jesus by the "chief priests and the teachers [scribes] of the law" (2:4) when they do not respond to what they know to be true. When Herod inquired of them as to where the Christ should be born, they responded correctly, but did not act on that knowledge: '"In Bethlehem in Judea,' they replied, 'for this is what the prophet has written'" (2:5). Matthew suggests beforehand the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders that will ultimately end in His death. As Jesus completes His ministry to Israel, He forewarns His disciples about the clandestine operation of the religious leaders: "From that time on Jesus began to explain to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that He must be killed and on the third day be raised to life" (16:21).

Again, Matthew reveals Jesus' prediction about His death by the leaders of Israel: "When they came together in Galilee, he said to them, 'The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life.' And the disciples were filled with grief" (17:22-23). Finally, for the third time, Jesus reveals the evaluative point of view of the leaders in that He once more makes known their intent to destroy Him: "Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, 'We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!'" (20:17-19).

As Matthew concludes his Gospel, he draws attention to the religious leaders (referred to as false prophets in 7:15 and 24:11, 24) in their final outrage against Him.

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[77]See Kingsbury, *Story*, 48-49.

In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. [42]"He saved others," they said, "but he can't save himself! He's the King of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. [43]He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, 'I am the Son of God.' " [44]In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him. (27:41-44)

"He saved others" is reflective of 1:21; "He's the King of Israel" is reflective of 2:2; and "I am the Son of God" is reflective of 3:17. The chief priest, the teachers of the Law, or the elders did not have the mind of God in their conception of Jesus.

John the Baptist's Evaluative Point of View

John the Baptist's evaluative point of view is revealed in his confrontation with the religious leaders (Matthew 3:7-12).[78] For example, Matthew captures John's graphic prediction of the Coming One in glowing terms: "I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (3:11-12). The chaff represents the religious leaders (false prophets) who did not share God's evaluative point of view.

Satan's Evaluative Point of View

Following the baptismal scenario, even Satan acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God:

- The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." (4:3)[79]
- Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down." (4:5-6)

Satan expresses God's point of view about Jesus, but he did not possess God's point of view about Jesus' purpose in coming (4:1-11). He did not think the things of God. It is in this vein that our Lord rebuked Peter for not having the mind of God concerning His death upon the cross (16:21-23).

Peter's Evaluative Point of View

Peter's evaluation of Jesus in 16:13-20 reflects God's evaluative point of view in 3:17. Matthew highlights God's point of view in the baptismal scene of Jesus. Apart from Matthew's introduction—"Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John" (3:13)—we observe a dialogue between John and Jesus (3:14-15) and two revelatory events that follow (3:16-17). Following the baptism of Jesus, one hears the voice of God: "And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased'" (3:17). As stated above, after this acknowledgement by God, Matthew records Jesus' encounter with Satan (4:1-11). It is quite evident that Satan did not deny what God stated, but he did not think the things of God. In other words, he sought to undermine God's way of redemption. Later in Matthew's story (16:21-28:20) when Peter tried to prevent the Atonement, Jesus rebuked him, because, he, too, did not think the things of God: "Get

[78]See Kingsbury, *Story*, 49-51, for an insightful analysis of the Baptist's point of view.

[79]In the Greek New Testament there are many kinds of conditional statements. There are four classes of conditional sentences that are outstanding in usage. The first class condition, the one employed by Satan, affirms the reality of the condition. It is expressed by (*ei*, "if") with the indicative mood in the protasis (if clause) and almost any mood or tense in the apodosis (main or fulfillment clause **εἰ**). This interpretation is required according to Greek syntax. Whenever the indicative with ει (*ei* "if" clause) is employed instead of the subjunctive with **ἐάν** (*ean*, "if" clause), then, one must assume the truth of the protasis (if clause). This construction confirms the condition and is best translated "Since you are the Son of God. . . ."

behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men" (16:23). Surely, the implied reader must have reflected back upon the temptation scene of Jesus (4:1-12).

But Peter, prior to this rebuke, confessed the mind of God: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (16:16). Following this confession, Jesus says, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven" (16:17). This statement by Jesus is also reminiscent of the baptismal scene in which God publicly declared Jesus to be His Son (3:17). Immediately after Jesus reveals His death, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John into the Mount of Transfiguration. Once more, God enters the world of man and proclaims: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" (17:5).

SECOND MAJOR SECTION

4:17—16:20

Following Matthew's introduction to Jesus as Messiah (1:1—4:16), he embarks upon Jesus' ministry to the nation of Israel (4:17—11:1).[80] Matthew calls attention to Jesus' ministry with three passages that focus upon His teaching, preaching, and healing (4:23; 9:35; 11:1). Just as John began his ministry with a call to repentance, so did Jesus: "From that time on Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near"' (4:17). Jesus viewed the multitudes as sheep without a shepherd: "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (9:36). The leaders of Israel (false prophets) had become evil. This evil caused Jesus to respond with: "You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks" (12:34). This statement of Jesus is also an echo of John's denunciation of the Pharisees and Sadducees who approached John: "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance"' (3:7-8).

JESUS' MINISTRY TO ISRAEL

4:17—11:1

Jesus' Teaching Ministry to Israel

In Jesus' ministry to Israel, He rebukes the religious leaders for their refusal to discern the will of God for their lives (5:20), and He also summons the crowds to repent and believe the Gospel (4:17; 4:23; 9:35; 11:1). After Jesus learns of John's imprisonment, He returns to Galilee to continue His ministry to Israel (4:12). Later He leaves Nazareth and lives in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali (4:12-13). During this period of time, He proclaims the Good News that the kingdom of heaven is near (4:17). On one occasion as Jesus walks by the Sea of Galilee, He calls Simon Peter and Andrew (brother of Peter) to follow Him (4:18-20). Shortly thereafter, He also invites two other brothers (James and John) to follow Him (4:21-22). Following a number of miracles by Jesus (see Chapters 8 and 9), Jesus calls Matthew to become one of His disciples (9:9-13). Then, in Chapter 10, Matthew informs us that He calls all of His disciples unto Himself (10:1-4).

Following the call of His disciples, Matthew informs his readers that Jesus went throughout Galilee "Teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people" (4:23). It is significant that Matthew repeats these three activities in 9:35 and 11:1. The third summary of Jesus' ministry only mentions two of the three deeds.

[80]See Kingsbury, *Story*, 59-76.

Matthew 4:23	Matthew 9:35	Matthew 11:1
Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.	Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness.	After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee.

As a result of these activities, His fame spread throughout Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and the region across the Jordan (4:25). His healing ministry quickly spread all over Syria (4:24), and as a result of this healing ministry people flocked from all over the area to be healed. Matthew reports the events with these words:

> News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed, and he healed them. [25] Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis,[a]Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him. (4:24-25)

Immediately following this healing ministry, Jesus saw the crowds that accompanied Him and He went up on a mountain and began to teach His disciples (5:1-7:28). If we want to understand what He taught (4:23), then we must read the Sermon on the Mount. In this Sermon, Jesus taught His disciples that repentance involves a call to responsibility. This Sermon is a direct refutation of the teachings and practices of the religious leaders (5:17-20). Following this teaching, Matthew gives a comment that is rather striking: "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law" (7:28-29). Just as in the first section of Matthew's story (1:1—4:16), the reader is once again alerted to the hypocrisy of the leaders of Israel. The battle is about to begin but does not really take hold with increased momentum until Chapter 12.

This battle of friction was suggested beforehand in His exhortation concerning impending persecution by the religious leaders (5:10-13) whom He later described as false prophets (7:15). After the Beatitudes, Jesus further warns the disciples about inner motives for right behavior. Again Jesus alerts His listeners to the religious leaders: "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (5:20). This statement by Jesus echoes John's renunciation of the Pharisees (3:7) and the complicity of the teachers of the Law with Herod (2:4).

Jesus, following His reference to the righteousness of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law (scribes), pinpoints some of their teachings (5:21-48) and acts of piety (6:1-18). In calling attention to their teachings, He says, "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago" (5:21a), "But I tell you" (5:22). Jesus is not contradicting the Law, but rather He is setting forth the true interpretation of the Law. He is not nullifying the Law; that is to say, He is not setting aside the requirements of the Law. If Jesus is abolishing the Law as advocated by many Christians, then this interpretation contradicts Jesus' earlier statement:

> Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. [18]I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. [19]Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (5:17-19)

[a] That is, the Ten Cities

Jesus' Healing Ministry to Israel

Jesus' ministry to Israel not only includes teaching, but His ministry also reached out to those that were sick physically (8:1-9:38). With the healing ministry of Jesus, Matthew's readers are being prepared for the beginning of hostilities against Jesus. The skirmishes against Jesus are foreshadowed in the first part of Matthew's story (1:1—4:16) and also Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount foretells the confrontations (5:10-12). After coming down from the mountain, Jesus engages in a healing ministry (Chapters 8 and 9 record ten miracles). Matthew makes known that Jesus heals a leper (8:1-4), restores a paralyzed servant of a centurion (8:5-13), cures Peter's mother-in-law (8:14-15), and, later that evening, He casts out demons and heals all the sick (8:16-17). Not only does Matthew record therapeutic miracles, but he also tells about a non-therapeutic miracle, namely, the calming of the winds and the waves of the sea (8:23-27). Following the non-therapeutic miracle, Matthew discloses the healing of two demon-possessed men (8:28-34).

After these healings, Jesus entered a boat and returned to His own town (9:1). Upon His arrival, men of the city brought a paralytic to Him (9:2a). Instead of telling him to get up, Jesus simply says, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven" (9:2b). Matthew now introduces his readers to an indirect confrontation with Jesus by the teachers of the Law. Again, we are reminded of the words of Jesus following His evaluation of the ethical behavior and teachings of the religious leaders: "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves" (7:15). These teachers of the Law do not openly confront Him about His statement on forgiveness, but as Matthew says, "At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, 'This fellow is blaspheming!'" (9:3). Suddenly, in this ninth chapter, we witness conflict as it materializes. To illustrate, we should observe Matthew's telling of the story. He says that Jesus, "knowing their thoughts," said to them:

> Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? [5] Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? [6] But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins. . . ." Then he said to the paralytic, "Get up, take your mat and go home." [7] And the man got up and went home. [8] When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to men. (9:4-8).

Not only does the second section (4:17—16:20) of Part One (4:17—11:1) emphasize Jesus' ministry to Israel, but it also emphasizes the disciples' ministry to Israel. Jesus sends the Twelve out to "Preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons" (10:7-8). Conspicuously absent is the command to teach. They were to perform, at least from the context, two aspects of ministry: (1) proclaim that the kingdom of heaven is near, and (2) perform miracles of healing.

Next in Chapter 10, we behold bitter, antagonistic conflict on the horizon. By the end of this second discourse (the charge to the Apostles), one senses the trend toward warlike conflict toward Jesus by the religious leaders. In this chapter (10), Jesus again cautions them about the religious leaders as He did in the Sermon on the Mount (7:15). He says, "I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves" (10:16). He also warns them to "Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and flog you in their synagogues" (10:17). Jesus had earlier warned them about the reaction of people in general as well as the dangers of the religious leaders.

> Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. [11] "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. [12] Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (5:10-12)

Jesus' Preaching Ministry to Israel

As stated earlier, Jesus "went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people" (4:23). In 4:17, Matthew reports Jesus as saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near." It is through this proclamation that Jews and

Gentiles alike will be enjoined upon to make a decision. The question is: Will they repent and become followers of Jesus and enter the sphere of God's gracious Rule, or will they refuse to enter God's kingdom and live in the sphere of Satan's Rules?

What does the "kingdom of heaven" mean? Does not this phrase simply call attention to the truth that God rules? Is the kingdom of heaven equivalent to someone saying the Rule of God, or God reigns? When John said, "the kingdom of heaven is near" (3:2), did he not denote that the kingdom is coming near, or is approaching? John, Jesus, and the Apostles were advancing the concept that God has drawn near. For Matthew, God draws near in the person of Jesus Messiah, the Son of God. Matthew reports that "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel"—which means, 'God with us'" (1:23). And in 12:28, Matthew states Jesus' announcement: "if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."

The Gospel of the kingdom is about Jesus Messiah, the Son of God. The Gospel of the kingdom is clear: it is the Good News about God's way of salvation that is revealed in Jesus. The Gospel is that which the angel announces to Joseph: "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins" (1:21). The Gospel is simply Good News about God's way of salvation by grace through Jesus. Jesus sums up this Good News in a conversation with Nicodemus:

> For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,[f] that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. [17] For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. [18] Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.[g] [19]This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. [20] Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. [21]But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God."[h] (John 3:16-21)

THE ELEMENT OF CONFLICT IN 4:17—11:1

The element of conflict does not dominate 4:17—11:1 (part "A") as it does in 11:2—16:20 (part "B"). Part "A" of the second major section focuses more on the teaching, preaching, and healing (4:23; 9:35; 11:1) than it does on the friction between Jesus and the scrupulous leaders. Nevertheless, the reader still reads of hostility between Jesus and the religious leaders. In part "A" the reader is alerted to disunity between Jesus and the religious leaders in His healing of the paralytic (9:1-8). In this first section, we are led to count on battle. In 4:17—8:34, Matthew forewarns the reader that we are to anticipate conflict. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount warns the disciples about persecution (5:10-12), and He also describes the righteousness that falls short of what is necessary for entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven (5:20).

Jesus in His now-famous Sermon speaks of the acts of piety performed by religious leaders as being hypocritical in nature (6:1-18). Following this rebuke of the rigid leaders' motives, then Matthew concludes the Sermon on the Mount with: "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law" (7:28-29). Finally, Matthew records Jesus' admiration of the centurion's faith (8:5-10) versus the lack of faith on the part of the leaders: "I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (8:11-12).

Now in Chapter 9, the conflict that the readers have been led to anticipate shows its ugly face. It has now materialized. It is here, not in full bloom, but in bud. This conflict is not direct but indirect. Matthew carefully reveals that the charges brought against Him, following the healing of a paralytic, were indirect: "At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, 'This fellow is blaspheming!'" (9:3). They declare "to

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[f] Or *his only begotten Son*

[g] Or *God's only begotten Son*

[h] Some interpreters end the quotation after verse 15.

themselves," says Matthew. Following the call of Matthew into discipleship, the religious leaders observed Jesus having dinner with tax collectors and sinners in Matthew's home (9:9-10). The Pharisees objected to Jesus' behavior, but they did not question Jesus directly about His behavior but rather His disciples (9:11).

In Chapter 10, Jesus summons His disciples and delivers to them His missionary charge (10:1-15). In the conclusion of this missionary charge, Jesus immediately forewarns them of irreconcilable conflict between themselves and the people (10:16-39). Just as Jesus had warned them about false prophets (religious leaders) in the Sermon on the Mount (7:15), now Jesus warns them about "wolves" (the people) in His sending them out to preach and to heal (10:7, 8, 16).[81]

In the first major section (1:1—4:16), Matthew presents Jesus as the main character of his story. He demonstrates that Jesus is aligned with God as His authoritative Son (3:17). Matthew discloses two evaluative points of view that forcefully stand out in this first section; namely, God's point of view that Jesus is His Son (3:17) and Satan's challenge to Jesus in this capacity (4:3, 6).[82] The secular and religious leaders in this part of the story are characterized as evil. Their evaluative point of view is an observation that is at odds with God's declaration. The religious leaders are not only set forth as aligned with Herod (2:1-6), but they are also set in opposition to John the Baptist who is supportive of Jesus (3:7-12).[83] In this first section, we come away with the recognition that neither Jesus nor the religious leaders are aware of each other. But, in spite of this lack of awareness, we, upon a closer reading, immediately grasp that the leaders' threat to Jesus is foreshadowed through Herod's plot to kill Jesus (2:3-6). Also we immediately grasp Jesus' eschatological judgment (Matthew 24 and 25) as foreshadowed through the prophecy of John the Baptist:

> But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? [8] Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. [9] And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. [10] The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. [11] "I baptize you with[b] water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. [12] His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire." (3:7-12)

As stated above, the second major section (4:17—16:20) of Matthew's story divides itself into two segments (4:17—11:1 and 11:2—16:20). The first division (part A), in this second major section, focuses on the ministry of Jesus to Israel and the second division's (part B) central point is on Israel's repudiation of Jesus. In the first division of this second section, Matthew's controlling emphasis appears to be Jesus' ministry of teaching, preaching, and healing (4:23; 9:35; 11:1), rather than on the element of clash between Jesus and Israel (leaders and the people), though this element is still present. In this first section (part A) Jesus calls Israel to repentance and announces the Kingdom of Heaven (4:17). But in this second section (11:2—16:20) of the second major division (4:17—16:20), we observe Jesus' anguish of Israel's negative response to Jesus' call of repentance (11:16-19). In concluding this section about Jesus' ministry to Israel, we should observe that Matthew prepares the reader for the conflict that is about to begin.

ESCALATION OF CONFLICT BETWEEN JESUS AND THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN 11:1—16:20

In part "B" of the second major section, the leaders' threat to kill Jesus escalates to the point of their plotting to rid themselves of Him (12:14). This plot is foreshadowed by their accusation of blasphemy in 9:3. But in this latter half (part B) of the second part of Matthew's story, one observes an escalation of conflict. The religious leaders' hostilities are no longer secretive (9:1-8), but their ill will is now one of direct confrontation

[81]Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Story*,
[82]Powell, "Leaders," 217.
[83]Ibid.
[b] Or *in*

over the disciples' picking heads of grain on the Sabbath (12:2-8). Following this showdown, the Pharisees followed Him into *their* synagogues (12:9) seeking to find something to accuse Him of (12:10). The leaders are no longer hesitant to speak to Him directly. To illustrate consider the following encounters:

Matthew 12:9-10

Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, [10]and a man with a shriveled hand was there. Looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, they asked him, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?"

Matthew 12:38

Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you."

Also, the leaders do not mind criticizing His disciples to His face.

Matthew 12:2

When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath."

Matthew 15:1-2

Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, [2] "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!"

In this second subdivision (part B), we observe the intensity of controversy. Prior to this level of antagonism, interaction was to some extent avoided. But now controversy saturates this section. This is the pattern one detects in 12:2-8, 9-14, 38-45; 15:1-9. This passion of hatred is so great against Jesus that the religious leaders seek His life. Matthew captures this intense dislike with these words: "The Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus" (12:14). In this direct confrontation with Jesus, He twice speaks of eschatological judgment against these leaders (12:22-37, 38-45). Jesus speaks of judgment when they accuse Him of doing His miracles through the prince of demons (Beelzebub); second, He speaks of judgment when they refuse to believe and request another sign.

Jesus and Beelzebub

Matthew 12:36-37

But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. [37] For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned.

The Sign of Jonah

Matthew 12:41-42

The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one[a] greater than Jonah is here. [42] The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here.

[a] Or *something*; also in verse 42

These two judgments foreshadow the eschatological judgment that Jesus elaborates in Matthew 24 and 25. This judgment is the same "coming wrath" that John the Baptist forewarned the religious leaders about when they came to him for baptism (3:7-12): "His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (3:12). Jesus again alludes to this judgment in the Parable of the Weeds (13:36-43):

> As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. [41]The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. [42]They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. [43]Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear. (13:40-43)

As stated above, the religious leaders' opposition with Jesus escalates. Following the attack against Jesus in Matthew 12, the demanding leaders plot how they might destroy Him (12:14). The critical leaders are presented to the reader as characters who are "evil" (12:23, 39, 45; 16:4), spiritually blind (12:24, 38, 42; 16:3), hypocritical (12:10; 15:7; 16:10), conniving (12:14), murderous (12:14), unfaithful to God (12:39; 16:4), unrepentant (12:41), and lawless (15:3, 6). In addition to the above, Jesus also likens them to a man possessed by a demon (12:43-45); and they are also pictured as acting in a manner representative of Satan (12:38; 16:1). These are the ones who Jesus warned His disciples about in the Sermon on the Mount (7:15).

Development of the Conflict

In this second major section (4:17—16:20), part B (11:2—16:20), we witness the escalation of conflict. The following is a chronological listing of the various encounters between Jesus and the religious leaders:

- 12:1-8 Plucking Grain on the Sabbath
- 12:9-14 Healing of the Man with a Withered Hand
- 12:22-37 Healing Blind and Dumb Demoniac
- 12:38-45 Demand for a Sign
- 15:1-20 Eating with Defiled Hands
- 16:1-4 Second Demand for a Sign
- 16:5-12 The Leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees

These seven encounters demonstrate the hatred that the religious leaders exhibited toward Jesus. Even with the miracles, they were not persuaded as to the true identity of Jesus. Part B of the second major section is about the repudiation of Jesus' ministry to Israel. As stated in the first major section (1:1—4:16), the identity of Jesus is presented with the climax in God's announcement of who Jesus really is: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (3:17).

Entwined with the motif of repudiation in 11:2—16:20 is also the speculation about the identity of Jesus. The questioning begins with John the Baptist: "When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, he sent his disciples to ask him, 'Are you the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?'" (11:2-3). Even the crowds question one another: "Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. All the people were astonished and said, 'Could this be the Son of David?'" (12:22-23).

CONFLICTING VIEWS ABOUT THE IDENTITY OF JESUS

As mentioned above, Matthew presented the various viewpoints about Jesus in 1:1-4:16. But in this second part, we are also confronted even more pointedly than in the first part as to the identity of Jesus. It is significant that God in Part One (1:1—4:16), as well as in Part Two (4:17-16:20), breaks into the world of

Matthew with His evaluative point of view about Jesus (3:17; 17:5). This identity of Jesus also permeates, in greater detail, in the third section (16:21—28:20). This identity is of such a controversial nature that Jesus even asked the disciples what people were saying about whom the Son of Man is (16:13).

As a result of Jesus' widespread activity of teaching, preaching, and healing, His fame spreads throughout Palestine and even Syria (4:23-25; 9:36, 31, 33, 35; 11:2, 4; 13:54; 14:1). But in spite all of this fame, we still observe conflicting views about the true identity of Jesus of Nazareth. The reaction to Jesus is mixed. For example, the crowds follow Him (4:24-25; 8:1, 10; 9:33; 12:15; 13:2; 14:13; 15:30-31), but, on the other hand, the religious leaders place Him under scrutiny (9:3, 11, 34). In spite of His fame, in spite of His teaching, in spite of His preaching, and, in spite of His healing, nevertheless, Israel, as a whole, repudiates Him (11:2—12:50). The religious leaders and the crowds do not recognize His true identity.

Towns in Galilee

This conflict is not surprising to Matthew's readers because they had been forewarned (2:3; 3:7-12; 9:3, 11, 14, 34; 10:5-42). Jesus was amazed at the unbelief of so many in their rejection of Him. Jesus renounces the people for their turning away from John and especially Himself (11:16-19). Jesus issues condemnation on the cities of Korazin, Bethsaida (11:20-21), and Capernaum (11:23-24) for their unwillingness to be moved to repentance following His mighty miracles. Even the townspeople of Nazareth were astonished at the teaching of Jesus: "'Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?' And they took offense at him" (13:55-57a).

Herod Antipas

Herod Antipas, having heard news about Jesus, speculates about Him: "At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus, and he said to his attendants, 'This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him'" (14:1-2). Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great, inherited Galilee and Perea as his kingdom. He is the one that had previously beheaded John the Baptist at the request of his wife's daughter Herodias (14:3-11). He did not possess the mind of God as to who Jesus really is.

Disciples of Jesus

But in contrast to all these, the disciples having been caught in a storm, watching Jesus walk on water, seeing Peter saved from drowning, and witnessing the calming of the sea (14:24-33), they all proclaimed: "Truly you are the Son of God." (14:33). This correct response is the answer to an earlier question that they had asked when Jesus calms a storm: "What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!" (8:27). Matthew concludes this second major section with two evaluative points of view which he juxtaposes, or puts side by side, to each other in order to bring his story to a culmination—Peter's confession near Caesarea Philippi (16:13-20): "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (16:16). Peter's point of view is correct because it is in alignment with God's point of view (3:17; 16:23a). On the other hand, the evaluative viewpoint of the various segments of the Jewish nation is that He is just one of the prophets (16:13-14).

In the second part (4:17—16:20), Matthew tells of Jesus' ministry to Israel (4:17—11:1) and of Israel's response to Him (11:2—16:20). Through His ministry, Jesus summons Israel to repentance and to live in the sphere of God's end-time rule (5:1-8:1). Despite His plea for restoration and acceptance of Himself as the Son of God, some charged Him with blasphemy (9:3). This section consists mainly of Jesus' teaching, preaching, and healing (4:23; 9:35; 11:1).

In the later part of Matthew's story, we observe a change (11:2—16:20). To all intents and purposes, Jesus' ministry is without success. In fact, Israel's response to His ministry is one of repudiation. The religious leaders attack Jesus Himself over the traditions of the elders and seek His life (12:1-8, 9-14; 15:1-9). The

leaders dismiss Him outright as an agent of Satan (9:34; 12:24). The Jewish crowds look upon Him as another prophet (16:13-14).

In contrast to both the crowds and the leaders, the disciples confess Him to be the Messiah Son of God (16:16; 14:33). Still, despite the correctness of their confession, Jesus commands them to silence. They do not yet fully understand that the central task before Him is death upon a cross. Israel is ignorant as to who Jesus is, but the disciples know Him to be the Son of God. Jesus' ministry is without success, at least according to the religious leaders and the crowds. On the other hand, His ministry, in the sight of God, is successful because He accomplished redemption for the sins of the world.

THIRD MAJOR SECTION

16:21—18:20

The Journey to Jerusalem

Matthew begins Section Three with Jesus' prediction about His ultimate fate (crucifixion) by the religious leaders. He writes, "From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life" (Matthew 16:21). We observe that in this explanation of His impending death, Jesus sets forth the concept that His death is necessary ("he must go" or "it is necessary," **δεῖ** (*dei*`). God and Jesus intend this death for the salvation of all humanity (1:21), but, on the other hand, the religious leaders' objective is destruction (12:14). Matthew employs the passion-prediction as another literary device to give cohesion to the third part of his story. He records three references to Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection (16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19).

Prior to these predictions, we recall Peter's confession about Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God (16:16). Following this confession, Jesus warned the disciples "not to tell anyone that he was the Christ." One reason for this silence was that the disciples still did not understand the full mission of Jesus. Again, following the transfiguration of Jesus, the three disciples—Peter, James, and John—were told: "Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead" (17:9).

The disciples still did not understand that Jesus had to die for the sins of the world. After Jesus' first announcement about His death, Peter immediately rebuked Jesus: "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" (16:22). Peter still did not understand the Atonement. Jesus then reprimanded Peter for not thinking the "things of God," but rather the "things of men": "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men" (16:23). The readers of Matthew's Gospel would naturally reflect upon Jesus' temptation in the wilderness when Satan also sought to frustrate the scheme of God: "Away from me, Satan!" (4:10). Peter's evaluative point of view did not coincide with that of God's.

Subsequent to this rebuke by Jesus, we find three of Jesus' disciples with Him on the Mountain. In the transfiguration of Jesus, God gives His viewpoint concerning the identity of His Son and the necessity of the death of His Son. Earlier, it is recalled that God entered into the world as actor and gave His testimony. Matthew records this intervention: "And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (3:17). In this second revelation of God's point of view, He adds an additional statement: "Listen to him!" (17:5). On the way back to Jerusalem, as stated above, Jesus informs the disciples of His impending death (16:21), but Peter says "no" (16:22). On the Mount, God says, "Listen to Him!" They were to listen to His warnings about His impending death (16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19).

Following the confession of Peter in Caesarea Philippi and the Mount of Transfiguration scene, Jesus and His disciples enter Galilee. Upon entering this territory, Jesus for the second time tells them of His impending death: "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life" (17:22-23). We can still hear the echo of God's voice: "Listen to Him!" They were to receive that which God had ordained—suffering and death in Jerusalem. Yet, the disciples still would

not understand the implications of this death until after the resurrection: "As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, 'Don't tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead'" (17:9). The disciples did not fully understand these events until Jesus met with them after the resurrection and explained the "things of God":

> He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms." [45]Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. [46]He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, [47]and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. [48] You are witnesses of these things.˜ (Luke 24:44-48)

When Jesus completed His work in this area (Galilee), He started toward Jerusalem (Matthew 20:17). He took His disciples apart privately and, again for the third time explained the "things of God": "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the Law. They will condemn him to death and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!" (20:18-19).

From the border of Jericho, Jesus journeys in the direction of Jerusalem and arrives at the Mount of Olives (21:1). The events that now transpire are shrouded in the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. Israel receives Jesus into Jerusalem as the Son of David (21:9). When the inhabitants of Jerusalem inquired of the crowds as to whom this Jesus is, the people replied: "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee" (21:11). This confession of the crowds is similar to the remarks of the disciples concerning the identity of Jesus as reported by the people: "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." To the people, Jesus is no more than a prophet, even though they spoke of Him as the Son of David. Israel still did not understand God's evaluative viewpoint about Jesus.

Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem marked the beginning of the end of His conflict with the religious leaders. His actions caused the religious leaders to engage Him in direct confrontation over His course of actions. Jesus attacked the seat of their power: "My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it a 'den of robbers'" (21:13). Jesus launches a massive assault upon their authority and integrity (21:12-13). This action paves the way for the thorny controversies with the religious leaders leading up to His crucifixion. As Jesus debates and speaks in parables, the tension between Him and the religious leaders reach a breaking point (21:12-23:39).

The confrontation with Jesus widens to the point that it includes representatives of all the groups in Jerusalem:

- Chief priests and the scribes (21:15)
- Chief priests and the elders of the people (21:23)
- The disciples of the Pharisees along with the Herodians (22:15-16)
- The Sadducees (22:23)
- A lawyer from the Pharisees (22:24-35)

Following these confrontational episodes, Jesus Himself closes the series by challenging the Pharisees:

> "The son of David," they replied. [43] He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says, [44] "'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet." '[b] [45] If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?" [46] No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions. (Matthew 22:22-46)

After Jesus silences the leaders in debate, then the religious leaders leave the scene of the temple. Alone with the crowds and the disciples, He delivers a piercing chastisement against the religiosity of the religious

[b] Psalm 110:1

leaders. This scathing rebuke is reminiscent of His stern disapproval of the sanctimonious leaders in His Sermon on the Mount: "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (5:20).

Jesus begins His ministry with an analysis of their teachings and ends His ministry with another stinging condemnation of their ethical behavior. Jesus issues seven woes directed against their conduct (Chapter 23). Following this indictment of the rigid leaders for their shallow display of piety, He then proceeds to speak of God's judgment upon the nation of Israel (Chapter 24). This entire chapter is about God's eschatological judgment upon the nation, upon the unscrupulous shepherds, and upon the Temple. He then speaks three parables—The Parable of the Ten Virgins, The Parable of the Talents, and The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats—against the over-bearing leaders of Israel for their pretense of virtue (Chapter 25).

After concluding these three parables of judgment, Jesus again brings to the attention of His disciples the impending death that awaits Him by the chief priest and elders of the people (26:1-5). The leaders demonstrate their rejection of His parables by their plotting to put Him to death. The corrupt leaders rejected God's identity of Jesus Messiah as His Son (3:17; 17:5). Their evaluative viewpoint is not the "things of God," but rather, the "things of men."

Jesus now informs His disciples, after their request about the Passover, that it is time to prepare the Passover meal (26:1). It is during this meal that Jesus gives a glimmer of information as to what His death is all about: "Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins"' (26:27-28). Following this Supper, the political machinery starts to roll in its intensity for His crucifixion. Immediately upon His arrest, He is taken before the Sanhedrin (26:57-67), before Pilate (27:11-26), and then the soldiers mock Jesus (27:27-31). Matthew then describes in accelerated movement the events of the crucifixion (27:32-44), the death of Jesus (27:45-55), the burial of Jesus (27:57-66), the resurrection of Jesus (28:1-10), the guards' report (28:11-15), and finally the instructions of Jesus to His disciples about making disciples (28:16-20).

CONCLUSION

The third major division of Matthew's Gospel (16:21-28:20) is honeycombed with confrontations with the religious leaders. Beginning with Matthew 16:21, we observe an escalation of the "powers that be" to get rid of Jesus. The religious leaders are so cunning in their attack against Jesus that even the crowds are taken in by their hypocrisy (27:20). No wonder Jesus warned His disciples on two different occasions to "Watch out for false prophets" (Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24). The first warning followed Jesus' rebuke of the religious leaders' theology (Matthew 5-6) and the second and third warnings occurred following His seven woes (Matthew 23) against the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. The false prophets in the Gospel of Matthew refer, so it appears, to the religious leaders. Throughout the ministry of Jesus, He scrutinizes the unethical behavior of the leaders. Conflict with the leaders of Israel permeates the whole of Matthew's Gospel.

This chapter ("A Literary Analysis of the Gospel of Matthew") has analyzed the three major divisions in the Gospel of Matthew. Throughout the three sections (1:1—4:16; 4:17—16:20; 16:21-28:20) of Matthew's Gospel, the identity of Jesus permeates all three divisions. In these three divisions, we observe that conflict abounds from the beginning to end. To begin with, Matthew foreshadows this disunity but in the ministry of John the Baptist, we observe direct confrontation. Jesus begins His ministry with an analysis of the religious leaders' concept of God's righteousness, and He concludes His ministry with His analysis of the religious leaders' characteristics (Chapters 24 and 25). The antagonism of the leaders of Israel against Jesus begins in the second major section. But in Part A we observe, not direct confrontation, but indirect confrontation. On the other hand, in Part B we observe an escalation of the quarrels with Jesus by the leaders—it is now direct. In the third major section (16:21—28:20), this animosity against Jesus reaches its climax on the part of the leaders in the crucifixion of Jesus.

This chapter is the background for the next chapter (3) entitled "False Teachers." Unfortunately, it is necessary to call attention to the erroneous use of "false teachers" by many sincere and godly men and women. Since this book deals with old texts through new eyes, it is necessary, at least in the tenor of this book, to

evaluate the “old” way of interpretation, that is to say, our interpretation without regard to context versus, or in opposition to, the “new” way, that is, the interpreter focuses upon the context in making our determination as to the teaching of any text, not just Matthew 7:15.

Since I live in Montgomery and have a ministry among those within the Churches of Christ, I decided that I would illustrate the abuse of this Scripture by some Churches of Christ in Montgomery as well as the mishandling of many other texts by countless devout believers within the various Churches of Christ journals. My objective in this book is not to condemn godly men and women, but rather, it is my goal to help Christians from all fellowships of the Resurrected One to learn to read the Word of God more accurately in order to maintain the unity for which Jesus prayed (John 17). Even though I deal with the ill-treatment of this text (Matthew 7:15) by many within the Churches of Christ, we can still learn much about how to interpret the Word of God apart from our own religious affiliation.

3

False Teachers

One of the main principles of the Protestant Reformation was that of *sola Scriptura*—the sole authority of Scripture in questions of faith. The Reformers themselves did not agree on the scope and application of that principle. Some, like Luther, meant by it that anything which was contrary to the clear words of Scripture should be rejected, while traditions that did not contradict the Bible could—and normally should—be retained. Zwingli and others went much farther and sought to do away with anything that was not clearly supported by Scripture. But in spite of these differences, all agreed that the reason why the Reformation was needed was that, to a greater or lesser degree, the tradition of the church made it difficult, if not impossible to read the Bible correctly.[84]

PRESENT CRISIS WITHIN THE CHURCHES OF CHRIST

Tradition is still making it difficult for Christians to read the Bible correctly. As a result of the foothold that custom has within many Churches of Christ as well as other Christian fellowships is hopelessly divided over opinions. These divisions are deep and wide. Issues are so hotly debated that for one to disagree with the status quo of a particular group is to call down upon one's head the epithet—"false teacher." The lines of demarcation are tearing the distinctive fellowship of God's people known as the Churches of Christ[85] into many warring factions. The heart of all the confusion is over pattern theology,[86] which focuses on the methodology of how to conduct a worship service on Sunday morning with its five-acts. Each group basically has its own agenda.[87] This chapter is a brief summary of the conflict within the Churches of Christ in its identification of

[84]Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980), 29.

[85]Some within the Churches of Christ deny that this movement is a denomination. The word *denomination* is usually assigned to other religious bodies, which epithet means that Baptist, Methodist, and so on, are not members of the body of Christ. The word *denomination* simply means to give a name to, that is to say, denominate. The Stone/Campbell movement understood the import of the word *denomination*. For an admission that the Church of Christ is a denomination in the same sense as all other religious bodies, see a comment by Alexander Campbell, one of the originators of the Stone/Campbell Movement. He wrote, as early as 1840, to a Baptist scholar, Andrew Broaddus, whom he called brother, about his concern over the written history of the Reformation Movement:

> Whenever the history of this effort at reformation shall have been faithfully written, it will appear, we think, bright as the sun, that our career has been marked with a spirit of forbearance, moderation, and love of union with an unequivocal desire for preserving the integrity, harmony, and co-operation of all who teach one faith, one Lord, and one immersion. In confirmation of this fact I am happy to add that no Baptist of good character for piety and morality, has ever been, because of a diverse theory or opinion, excluded from our communion or communities. . . . We, as a *denomination*, are as desirous as ever to unite and co-operate with all Christians on the broad and vital principles of the New and everlasting Covenant. Alexander Campbell, "The Editor's Response to Mr. Broaddus," *Millennial Harbinger*, New Series, 4, no. XII (December 1840): 556.

[86]"Pattern theology" is equivalent to the "regulative principle of worship" among the Presbyterians.

[87]To illustrate, for example confusion that exists within one of the major divisions within the Churches of Christ—the one-cup and non-Sunday school church—see Dallas Burdette, "A Brief History of the One-Cup and Non-Sunday School Movement" in *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood, Florida: Xulon, 2008), 27-54. This chapter details the

false prophets/teachers in Matthew's Gospel. Even though this study focuses upon the divisions within this once united body of believers, nevertheless, the problem of sectarianism abounds in other religious bodies—Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and so on.

Country-wide Dissension

The Churches of Christ today are experiencing change that is causing some churches to level the harmful charge of false prophets/teachers against those who turn aside from long defended cherished traditions (traditionalism). Again, as in the Reformation, our heritage has made it difficult for us to interpret the written Word accurately. Traditions are often equated with the Word of God itself. Leroy Garrett (1918-2015), professor and author, points out:

> People tire of our equating *our* understanding of the word of God with the word of God itself. This is to say that we must distinguish between revelation and interpretation. Revelation is what God has given us in scripture. Interpretation is what we conclude the scriptures to mean. One is divine, the other human.[88]

Many Christians can no longer distinguish between the interpretation of the interpretative community and the Word of God itself. It is in this vein of orthodoxy that Stafford North, former Academic Dean and Executive vice President of Oklahoma Christian University (served in this capacity for thirty-eight years and retired in 1994),[89] forewarns against change, but this, too, is based upon his own interpretative community.[90] North points out in defense of his position that "Paul, John, Jesus and others in the New Testament forbid anyone to change or vary from this teaching. Jesus warned of false teachers and spoke of those in judgment who thought they were His but would be turned away because he 'never knew them'" (Matthew 7:15-20).[91]

North cites many Scriptures to justify his negative position of turnabout within the Churches of Christ, but upon closer analysis of the Scriptures he cites, the evidence does not appear to support his judgment of indictment. We do not deny the Scriptures he relies upon to teach that we should not depart from the teachings of Jesus, but rather we reject his application of those Scriptures to maintain the status quo within his own interpretative community.

Each interpretative community advances its own brand of orthodoxy. There are approximately twenty-five divisions within the Churches of Christ, each one postulating its own trademark of conformity. The history of the Churches of Christ is riddled with conflict and division over peripheral issues. It is in this same vein of disharmony within the Churches of Christ that Richard H. Niebuhr (1894-1962), one of the most important Christian theological-ethicists in the 20th century America, addresses the subject of hostility within Christendom itself in his own day. He is correct when he concisely captures the very essence of exclusiveness through teaching the history of the church.

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many oddities advanced by the many divisions within this one-cup and non-Sunday school movement. Pattern theology is what the divisions are mainly fought over.

[88]Leroy Garrett, "It Means What It Says," *Restoration Review* 17, no. 4 (April 1975): 69.

[89]See http://www.oc.edu/faculty/stafford.north for this information, accessed on 7-23-2008.

[90]For an interpretation of the "interpretative community," see Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980), 171, where he says,

> Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions. In other words, these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around. . . . The first community will accuse the members of the second of being reductive, and they in turn will call their accusers superficial. The assumption in each community will be that the other is not correctly perceiving the "true text," but the truth will be that each perceives the text (or texts) its interpretive strategies demand and call into being.

[91]Stafford North, "How To Be Undenominational In A Denominational World," in Jim Sheerer and Charles L. Williams, eds., *Directions for the Road Ahead: Stability in Change Among Churches of Christ* (Chickasha, Oklahoma: Yeomen Press, 1998), 207.

> The teaching of church history is sometimes made the occasion for developing a sense of alienation from other groups rather than for developing a sense of unity. Like every other history, it is used at times to promote indoctrination in a peculiar tenet. Yet fundamentally and generally it is taught as church history.[92]

Exclusiveness is still the trademark of many denominations, not just the Churches of Christ. Having said this, this alienation reached a climax for some within the Churches of Christ in the 1960s. In 1966, for instance, seventeen men and women voiced their concern for change within the Churches of Christ.[93] They sought to develop a sense of unity within this divided movement. The concern of these Christians shook the establishment and reverberated throughout the Churches of Christ with fear of the unknown. Many were coming out of Plato's cave.[94] They were no longer seeing shadows, but they were seeing reality. Robert Myers in analyzing the tension build-up writes in his "Introduction" the following scenario that describes the purpose of the book:

> Some of us within the Church of Christ segment of the Restoration movement, and some recently out of it, have felt it imperative to analyze its failures. This anthology of essays is a criticism of a religious way of life. It is written by men who have remained within the Church of Christ, or by those who have felt they had to seek wider fellowship but still love dearly the people they left behind.[95]

Since the publication of *Voices of Concern* (1966), many leaders have repudiated the narrow-mindedness within many Churches of Christ. And, as a result of rethinking ritualistic worship positions (five acts) once held, many are now advancing the concept that God has not ordained a ritualistic worship service with five acts and also that God has a larger fellowship than just those within the Churches of Christ.[96] Thus, crises exist within the churches, and this call for change is working havoc among those who seek to stifle variation in the so-called worship service. For those seeking more freedom in their gatherings, they often suffer ostracism by other Christians.[97] Neal Pryor, former Vice President for Academic Affairs and Professor of Bible at Harding University, is correct when he writes: "There is hardly a congregation in our brotherhood that is not feeling the pressure for change. This trend can be a great benefit in that it calls us to re-examine what is really essential for us to keep and what are traditions that can and perhaps should be changed."[98]

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[92]H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), 15.

[93]Robert Meyers, ed., *Voices of Concern* (Saint Louis, Missouri: Mission Messenger, 1966).

[94]Plato, "The Simile of the Cave," in *Plato: The Republic*, translated with an Introduction by Desmond Lee (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 255-264; see also David Melling, *Understanding Plato* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 97-113.

[95]Myers, *Voices of Concern*, 1.

[96]For an excellent discussion of the so-called five acts of worship between Buff Scott and Gary Workman, see Buff Scott. Jr., "Acts of Worship," *The Reformer* 9, no. 5 (Sept-Oct 1993): 3-7. See also Mike Root, *Split Grape Juice: Rethinking the Worship Tradition* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 1992); Mike Root, *UnBroken Bread: Healing, Worship, Wounds* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 1997).

[97]See, for example, Don L. King, " Proper Perspective," *Old Paths Advocate* LXVII, no. 9 (September 1995): 2, where he expresses his rejection of those who do not conform to his interpretative community's stance on one-cup and non-Sunday school beliefs.

> Why do we worship with one cup? Answer: because we read it plainly in Matthew 26:27; Mark 14:23; Luke 22:17-20; 1 Corinthians 10:16; 11:25-28. Is it wrong, sinful, to use more than one? Answer: yes, because more than one cup violates the examples given in these verses, it violates the command for us to do as Jesus did, "this do ye. . . . " (1 Corinthians 11:25), etc., etc. Listen brethren: we believe it is wrong to use more than one cup. We believe people are going to be lost for using more than one cup. Surely, we believe that! If people are not going to be lost for using more than one, then let's give up the fight and heal the division caused by those who have insisted on using more than one. If it is wrong to use more than one cup in the Lord's Supper I can't worship with those who use more than one. If I can't worship with them I can't fellowship them and I can't fellowship you if you do! Is that simple? [sic].

[98]Neale T. Pryor, "The Essentials of the Faith: What Cannot Change," in *Church Unity: Stability & Flexibility in the Church*, 1995 Preacher's Forum, Harding University, Graduate School of Religion, ed. Donald Kinder (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Company, 1995), 33.

Curtis Cates (1941-2013), former Director of the Memphis School of Preaching and co-editor of *Yokefellow*, laments the fact that many within the Churches of Christ are no longer "set courageously for the defense of the Truth."[99] Again, he says, "Liberalism is an enemy of the light of God's Word, the absolute and knowable Truth (2 Tim. 3:14-17)."[100] He then identifies two men (Rubel Shelly and Randy Harris) within the Churches of Christ as associated with "the liberal, modernistic human philosophies."[101] These two men published a book to call attention to many of the traditions within the Churches of Christ that Christians should no longer adhere.[102] Cates complains that "Brethren Harris and Shelly propose to give us 'a theology for the 21st century church' (p. xiii); they will 'reexamine the foundation' (p. xiv)."[103] Once more, he calls attention to the urgency of stopping "The mouths of false witnesses."[104] He believes that these two men are attacking the truth.[105] He then relies upon 2 John 9-11 to justify separation and ostracism from these two men.[106]

Two years after the publication of the above book, Cates wrote another book in which he refers to Rubel Shelly by citing the words of Jesus in Matthew 7:15: "Jesus warned, 'Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves. By their fruits ye shall know them' (Mat. 7:15-16)."[107] In 1990, C. Leonard Allen published a book[108] that also caused him to come under "fire" from Cates as a false prophet. Cates accuses Allen of disrespect for the Word and also charges him with treating the Word as "unrealistic" and "fairy tale-like." Cates writes with hyper-critical judgment against Allen:

> In other words, what brethren did was fairy tale-like and unrealistic; one cannot know what Truth is, and to think he can is to merely dream. Is that what Christ commanded when He said, "Beware of false prophets . . . " (Mat. 7:15), or when He warned, "But in vain do they worship me, Teaching [sic] as their doctrines the precepts of men" (Mat. 15:9), or "Let them [false teachers and their religions] alone: they are blind guides" (Mat. 15:14), or what Paul meant when he charged, ". . . to whom we gave place in the way of subjection, no, not for an hour" (Gal. 2:5).[109]

In 1996, Jim Waldron, another patternist, wrote an article in which he, also, took to task the theology of Shelly and Harris. He, too, bemoans the fact that the teachings of Shelly and Harris have infiltrated the mission fields.[110] He further castigates these men by citing articles by Choate,[111] also patternistic in his theology, in which he says,

> He is also demonstrating how false teachers in this generation are seeking to do the same thing in some of our schools. Also, the *Firm Foundation* has over the last five years documented much of the current digressive movement coming out of Abilene Christian University.[112]

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[99]Curtis Cates, *The Second Incarnation: A Pattern for Apostasy* (Memphis, Tennessee: Cates Publication, 1992), 18. Cates resigned his position on March 27, 2007 and accepted his new position as Director Emeritus of the Memphis School of Preaching (www.msop.org, accessed on 7-23-08).

[100]Ibid., 19.

[101]Ibid.

[102]See Rubel Shelly and Randall J. Harris, *The Second Incarnation: A Theology for the 21st Century Church* (West Monroe, Louisiana: Howard Publishing Co., 1992).

[103]Cates, *Incarnation*, 20.

[104]Ibid.

[105]Ibid.

[106]Ibid., 25-27. For an excellent and detailed study on 2 John 9, see also Carl Ketcherside, "Receive Him Not," *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 6 (June 1965): 81-90. See also Chapter 11 of this book (*Old Texts through New Eyes*) for an examination of this much-debated text.

[107]Curtis Cates, *The "Core/Bull's Eye Gospel" Concept Refuted: Shall We Have a New "Cultural Church"?* (Memphis, Tennessee: Cates Publication, 1994), 15.

[108]C. Leonard Allen, *The Cruciform Church: Becoming a Cross-Shaped People in a Secular World* (Texas: Abilene Christian University Press, 1990).

[109]Cates, *Concept Refuted*, 38, 39.

[110]Jim Waldron, "False Teaching Comes to Mission Field," *Firm Foundation* 111, no. 9 (September 1996): 13.

[111]For an example of the five-acts of worship by Choate, see J. C. Choate, *Gospel Sermonnettes* (Winona, MS: J. C. Choate Publications, 1993), 102-104.

[112]Waldron, "False Teaching Comes to Mission Field," Firm *Foundation*, 13. For additional reading in this same vein, see Jim Laws, Lectureship director, *The Restoration: The Winds of Change*, Eighteenth Annual Spiritual Sword Lectureship [October 17-

This present crisis within the Churches of Christ involves the concept of pattern theology.[113] Pattern theology, as stated above, is the belief that God has ordained a prescribed ritual to be performed on Sunday morning in a prescribed manner in order for there to be "worship in Spirit and truth." Waldron calls attention to ten men that do not advance the so-called five acts of worship, also known as pattern theology. Waldron, as he cites Choate, states the matter firmly:

> Brother Goebel Music in 1991 published *Behold The Pattern*, in which he meticulously documented the uncertain sounds of ten preachers and/or college professors. These men are: Max Lucado, San Antonio, Texas; Stephen Taylor, former professor of Abilene Christian University, who is now in England; Larry James, Plano, Texas; Rick Atchley, Fort Worth, Texas; Randy Fenter, San Antonio, Texas; Jim Hackney, Fort Worth, Texas; Jeff Walling, Mission Viejo, Calif.; Randy Mayeux, Dallas, Texas; Rubel Shelly, Nashville, Tenn.; and Denny Boultinghouse, West Monroe, La.[114]

Just a perusal of the books and religious journals reveals the prevailing crisis that crystallizes around this expression (five acts): For example, Garland Elkins, Dean of Public Relations in the Memphis School of Preaching, asserts:

> There is a true worship. Jesus said, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). Without hesitation, we affirm that worship to God under the New Testament consists of preaching (Acts 20:7), the Lord's supper (Acts 20:7), singing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16), praying (Acts 2:42), and the giving of our means (1 Cor. 16:1-2). These five acts are the only authorized acts of worship to God.[115]

LOCAL DISSENSION IN MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA

The Churches of Christ in Montgomery are experiencing turmoil with unparalleled consequences—disunity. The former Seibles Road Church of Christ[116] in Montgomery published a weekly bulletin to call attention to apostasy—defection as defined by the Seibles Road Church of Christ's "interpretative community."[117] This bulletin printed articles by various authors to call attention to those who are so-called false prophets/teachers within the Churches of Christ.

The late O. B. Porterfield (1932-2005),[118] former pulpit minister for the Seibles Road Church of Christ, republished, in his November 3, 1996 bulletin an article written (originally written on September 25, 1996) by Ray Dutton, a former member of the Landmark Church of Christ. The Dutton article is prefaced with some remarks by O. B. Porterfield in which he reminds his readers that in May 1994 that he wrote about Buddy Bell and Joe Beam's appearance on Faulkner University's "Focus." His Preface is titled: "Buddy Bell Returns to

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21, 1993] (Memphis, TN: Getwell Church of Christ, 1993); Dave Miller, *Piloting the Strait: A Guidebook for Assessing Change in Churches of Christ* (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 1996); and William Woodson, *Change Agents and Churches of Christ: A Study In Contemporary problems With Change Agents Among Churches of Christ* (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 1994).

[113]For a detailed study of the oddities in pattern theology, see Dallas Burdette, *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative* (Longwood, FL: Xulon, 2008), 55-86.

[114]Ibid. For a detailed study and approval of this concept of pattern theology (five acts), see Goebel Music, *Behold the Pattern* (Colleyville, Texas: Goebel Music Publication, 1991), 393-394. See also Cates, *Incarnation*, 27-28.

[115]Garland Elkins, "Foreword," in Cates, *Concept Refuted*, 12-13.

[116]This congregation folded shortly after the retirement of O. B. Porterfield in 2000.

[117]This bulletin is in the Dallas Burdette's collection of books and journals, which is located in the library of Amridge University, Montgomery, AL.

[118]It is not my intention to castigate the various names mentioned in this chapter. My objective is to call attention to the predicament that the body of Christ experiences because of a lack of understanding as to what the heart of God's Gospel is all about. Most of the sources cited in this chapter occurred in the past; nevertheless, the problems still exists within many Churches of Christ throughout the Untied States as well as other parts of the world. My book (Old Texts through New Eyes) examines many of the Scriptures still cited by many God-fearing believers to maintain separation from other sincere believers. One objective of this book is to help Christians learn how to read the Word of God in context. Unfortunately, many Churches of Christ still adhere to the views set forth by O. B. Porterfield.

Montgomery."[119] In this "Preface," he expresses sorrow that his efforts were futile. He could not prevent these two men from appearing on Faulkner University's lectureship.

In the third paragraph of Dutton's letter to the elders of the Landmark Church of Christ, he says, "Recently, I became very upset about the scheduling of a known false teacher to speak to our young people."[120] Dutton continues in this letter to speak of Bell's association with other known false teachers: "Though I was well aware that Buddy had a reputation for keeping company with a number of known false teachers, I had hoped that he was personally committed to the truth of God."[121] He then cites Matthew 7:15 in warning the family at Landmark about Buddy Bell now minister of the Landmark congregation.[122] He writes of the danger of the souls at the Landmark Church of Christ.

> I would give up my family at Landmark and never return if that alone would save the many precious souls here who are now gravely in danger from a man I now believe is a false teacher "secretly brought in" (Gal. 2:4), who has come to God's flock in "sheep's clothing" (Mt. 7:15) but is in truth a "ravenous wolf."[123]

Matthew 7:15 is cited by Dutton as applicable to Bell. Dutton relates a series of questions that he presented to Bell in order to elicit from him his feelings about:

> (1) 'BAPTISM,' (2) 'INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC and DENOMINATIONALISM,' (3) 'SOLOS, CHOIRS, QUARTETS AND OTHER SPECIAL MUSIC,' (4) 'THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH,' (5) 'HONESTY WITH THE BRETHREN,' AND (6) 'FELLOWSHIP WITH THE DENOMINATIONS.'[124]

As a result of this encounter, Dutton then cites Titus 3:10 and combines this Scripture with 2 John 9-11 to justify his characterization of Bell as a false teacher. Joe Beam,[125] another minister who calls for reflection upon traditionalism, came under attack again by Jerry C. Brewer. Brewer cited Romans 16:17-18, 2 John 9-11, and Ephesians 5:11 to uphold his belief that Beam is a false teacher.[126] Philip Black,[127] former minister for the Carriage Hills Church of Christ in Montgomery, Al., also received a reprimand from Porterfield[128] and, at the same time, he also received the epithet of false teacher from Armond Hoover. Hoover expresses his concern over Black's influence within the Churches of Christ and then labels him as a false teacher.

> Your shallowness is showing, Brother Black. Brother O. B. and all other knowledgeable and understanding Christians know that only God can and will condemn the disobedient to His Will. However the righteous and obedient are commanded to (and will) warn and mark all false teachers and the disobedient (Rom. 16:17-18), beware of false prophets in sheep's clothing (Matt. 7:15-16) (or be aware – A.H.). A warning, Grievous wolves (false teachers—A. H.) will enter among us, not sparing the flock, even our own selves to draw away (deceive – A.H.) disciples after them (Acts 20:29-30).[129]

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[119]O. B. Porterfield, "Buddy Bell Returns to Montgomery," *Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (November 3, 1996): 1.

[120]Ray Dutton, "To: The Elders of the Landmark church of Christ," *Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (November 3, 1996): 1.

[121]Ibid.

[122]As of July 17, 2008, Buddy Bell is still the pulpit minister of this congregation.

[123]Ibid., 2.

[124]Ibid., 3. This citation appears in all caps in the original.

[125]Joe Beam was a former pulpit minister for the Carriage Hills Church of Christ—formerly called Family of God (F.O.G.)—in the city of Montgomery, AL. Today, 2008, this congregation is known as Grace Pointe Church of Christ. Scotty Harris is the senior minister (August 2002 to present). See http://www.grace-pointe.com for information on this fellowship (accessed on 7-23-2008)

[126]Jerry C. Brewer, "Oklahoma Brethren Issue Warning That Is On The 'Beam,'" Seibles *Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (February 2, 1997): 2.

[127]At the time of this attack by Porterfield, Philip Black was pulpit minister for the Carriage Hills Church of Christ, which is now, as stated above, known as Grace Pointe.

[128]O. B. Porterfield, "A Reader Responds And Speaks Out!," *Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (January 19, 1997): 1. Philip Black is now (2008) one of the shepherds of Grace Pointe Church of Christ, formally Carriage Hills Church of Christ.

[129]Armond Hoover, "Dear Philip Black," Ibid., 2. This article also criticizes unity in diversity and recommends Goebel Music's book, *Behold the Pattern* (Colleyville, TX: Goebel Music Publications, 1991). For a counter position of Hoover's negative

The third Church of Christ to come under attack in Montgomery was the Vaughn Park Church of Christ. Mark Smith, at the time of the attack, was the pulpit minister for this congregation.[130] On July 13, 1997, Porterfield lashed out against all three congregations (Landmark, Carriage Hills, and Vaughn Park) for their participation in a lectureship called "Jubilee." He wrote: "BUDDY BELL, minister at Landmark, and PHILIP BLACK, minister at the F.O.G (Family of God, Carriage Hills Church of Christ), were on the program and Vaughn Park Church of Christ advertised and encouraged people to attend this gathering of heretics."[131] In another bitter article, Porterfield cited Matthew 7:15 as applicable to Mark Smith: "We proved his error by the scriptures. Matt. 7:1-5 condemns harsh judgment, but a judgment must be made according to Matt. 7:15-16. John 7:24 command [sic] righteous judgement according to the Word of God, Psa. 119:172."[132]

These citations from the *Seibles Road Church of Christ* bulletin illustrate the crises and mindset that still exist in the city of Montgomery. I have reviewed various issues of this bulletin in order to preserve this history and to demonstrate the turmoil and confusion that exist within this once united body of believers. As we peruse the back issues of this now defunct bulletin, we observe, almost without exception, that every page of this paper summons the same Scriptures to justify separation from those who do not explain the Word of God as they were interpreted by this particular "interpretative community," namely, the Seibles Road Church of Christ. This brief review of the contemporary situation of division within the Churches of Christ in Montgomery calls for a reexamination of how to interpret and understand Scripture in light of its context. As of today (2008), three congregations of the Churches of Christ in Montgomery are still on the blacklist of the more conservative Churches of Christ.

CONCLUSION

This chapter examined the controversy within the Churches of Christ as to who is or who is not a false teacher. Journals and books were called forth to illustrate the confusion that exists among so many devout Christians. It was observed that Christians often tag other Christians as misleading teachers when anyone dares to go against the grain of the intelligence of the religious leaders in certain "interpretative communities." We are confronted with the question: Is deformity in comprehension in and of itself sufficient grounds for the epithet of false teacher/prophet? We must determine who is and who is not a counterfeit teacher from Scripture, not tradition.

The question is, is one a sham teacher simply because one believes in instrumental music, handclapping in the assembly, solo singing, Sunday schools, individual communion cups, orphan homes, Bible colleges, and so on? Since Jesus warns against imitation prophets (Matthew 7:15, 24:11, 24), we do have a responsibility to identify those who come under this classification. We must recognize a false teacher through a correct application of Scripture, not through the traditions of men. The Word of God alone is the criterion that can assist us in making this determination.

The perusal of the various Church of Christ journals revealed that certain Scriptures were relied upon to justify separation from other believers. Two Scriptures cited were 2 John 9 and Matthew 7:15.[133] Many writers,

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statements about unity in diversity, see Carl Ketcherside, "The Spirit and Unity," *Mission Messenger* 25, no. 7 (July 1963): 97-112 [1-16].

[130]See David Hester, "OFF THE MARK," *Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (May 18, 1997): 1, for his castigation of Mark Smith as a false teacher as well as a host of others labeled as false teachers. Today (2008), Brad Sullivan is the preaching minister.

[131]This commentary (comments) by Porterfield is written in support of an article written by Robert Dodson, "The Move to Unite With Denominationalists," *Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (July 13, 1997): 2.

[132]These comments are in response to an article written by Clifton D. Kelly, "Worrying Too Much about Error?," *Seibles Road Church of Christ Bulletin* (December 21, 1997): 2.

[133]See C. A. Smith, "Special Music," *Old Paths Advocate* LXVV, no. 3 (March 1996): 4-5; Mike McDanie, "The Right Hand of Fellowship," part 2, *The Light* 27, no. 1 (January 1996): 3-6; Carl Johnson, "The Trojan Horse in the Church," *Old Paths Advocate* LXVV, no. 2 (February 1996): 1, 7-8; James Meadows, "Does the New Testament Represent a Pattern to Follow?" *Firm Foundation* 110, no. 12 (December 1995): 8-10; Stan Cox, "Is Sincerity Sometimes Enough?" *Guardian of Truth* XXXIX, no. 8 (April 20, 1995):

in order to uphold their practice of ostracism, cited these verses to justify their narrow perception of fellowship among other Christians.

Chapter 4 explores the conditions in the first century that Jesus encountered from the religious leaders. Jesus faced two hundred years of traditions, which traditions made void God's Word. Today, Christians, at least from a Church of Christ background, face two-hundred years of traditions. Christendom, as a whole, face over five-hundred years of traditions inherited from the Reformation Movement. Many sincere believers within the Churches of Christ labor under the impression that they are not influenced by tradition, which notion is totally wrong. Leonard Allen's and Richard Hughes' comments upon this mindset disarm such impression:

> But this call brings a subtle but powerful temptation. It lures us into thinking that we can escape history and tradition entirely, blotting out the centuries that have passed and erasing all their effects. Such a process leads us to overlook our weaknesses, to think that we are something we are not, and ultimately to deny the fact that we, too, are mere mortals shaped by time and culture like everyone else.
>
> Furthermore, when our spiritual ancestors denied any complicity in human traditions and claimed to be only a people of the Book, they partook of a profound and longstanding irony. In their zeal to reject tradition, they actually became part of a long tradition in Christian history whose substance was rejection of tradition. While imagining that they stood alone, they actually stood shoulder to shoulder with Zwinglians, Puritans, Baptist, and others who also imagined they stood alone. This book focuses on that long Christian tradition created by those who claimed to have not tradition.
>
> Those of us who stand within the powerful tradition have tended to follow suit. While claiming to reject all human traditions, we have created and perpetuated traditions all the more entrenched for being unrecognized. Rather than escaping tradition, we who are the heirs of Barton Stone, Alexander Campbell, and David Lipscomb simply have failed to recognize the traditions at work in our midst.[134]

Just a cursory reading of this chapter reveals the dilemma that believers in Christ find themselves in. There are approximately twenty-five or more divisions just within the Churches of Christ. On the other hand, the Baptists, the Methodist, the Presbyterians, and many other denominations are divided over traditions, which traditions are often associated with the Word of God itself. The purpose of the next chapter (4) is to call attention to the role that religious leaders play in maintaining the traditions of the forefathers. One objective of this present chapter (3) as well as the next chapter (4) is to call attention to our need to reexamine old texts through new eyes.

21-22; Tom M. Roberts, "Romans 14: Satan's Trojan Horse for Fellowship with Error," *Guardian of Truth* XXXIX, no. 4 (February 16, 1995): 110-113 [12-17]; Don Walker, "Second John 9 in Light of Context," *The Restorer* (May/June 1989): 11-14; Jerry Moffitt, "Why I Don't Have Fellowship With Denominational 'Pastors' and Catholic Priests," *Contending for the Faith* XXVI, no. 8 (August 1995): 1, 3-6; William Woodson, "The Doctrine of Christ," *The Spiritual Sword* 22, no. 3 (April 1991): 35-38; Roy Deaver, "Who 'Splits the Log'?" *The Spiritual Sword* 15, no. 1 (October 1983):11-13; Garland Elkins (1926-2015), '"Receive Him Not'—II John 9-11," *The Spiritual Sword* 5, no. 2 (January 1974): 31-34.

[134]C. Leonard Allen and Richard T. Hughes, *Discovering Our Roots: The Ancestry of Churches of Christ* (Abilene, Texas: ACU Press, 1988), 3. I highly recommend this book. This book is a brief overview of the ancestry of the Churches of Christ.

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Political Power of the Pharisees

Orthodox Judaism is not simply "Old Testament theology without Jesus." It is the religion of "You have heard it said." This was Jesus' repeated response to the erroneous oral teachings of the Pharisees. We can use the same technique today as we examine the Talmud.[135]

The entire Gospel of Matthew is a book about conflict. This conflict centers on the religious leaders. John begins his ministry with conflict with the religious leaders. Jesus begins His ministry in Galilee with His Sermon on the Mount, which is an analysis of the religious leaders' teachings versus God's teachings. Jesus warns His disciples about "false prophets" in His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:15) and in His final discourse to His disciples about the religious leaders (Matthew 24:11, 24). Jesus sought to help the Jewish people to rediscover the Word of God in all its purity. The religious leaders in Jesus' day were not interested in rediscovering the Bible, but rather they were more interested in maintaining their traditions. Jesus, three times in the Gospel of Matthew, addresses the religious leaders and others as "false prophets." Yet today, when Christians try to rediscover "the truth of the Gospel," they, too, are often referred to as "false teachers." The Scriptures that Jesus cites against the religious leaders in His day are often cited very loosely against believers today who do not always concur with other believers over a so-called pattern for a public worship service.

In order to set the stage for the rediscovery of the Bible in the church today, hopefully, an analysis of the Pharisees and their oral Traditions will assist us in correctly handling these Scriptures about "false prophets" in our day-to-day walk with God. When Jesus appeared on the scene, He confronted over one hundred and fifty years of traditions from the Pharisees. Craig Blomberg, a distinguished Professor of the New Testament, says, "According to Josephus, the Pharisees emerged at least as early as the reign of John Hyrcanus, opposing the combination of kingly and priestly power in the Hasmonean rulers."[136] Walter Elwell and Robert Yarbrough point out that the name "'Pharisee' probably derives from an Aramaic word meaning 'separate'; hence, the Pharisees were 'the separate ones.'"[137] Since the synagogues were under their control and leadership, Joe Blair calls attention to the strong influence that the Pharisees had among the Israelites.[138] It is this control that John the Baptist and Jesus encountered in the beginning of their ministries. There are three basic sources that we rely

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[135]Gary North, *The Judeo-Christian Tradition: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), 73.

[136]Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 47. For an excellent overview of this time period, see Raymond P. Scheindlin, *A Short History of the Jewish People: From Legendary Times to Modern Statehood* (New York: Simon & Schuster Macmillan, 1998), 25-49.

[137]Walter A. Elwell and Robert W. Yarbrough, *Encountering the New Testament: A Historical and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 56. Elwell and Yarbrough add some additional information to the history of the Pharisees: "They came into being sometime before the New Testament era. According to Josephus they gained prominence during the reigns of John Hyrcanus I (135/4—104 B.C.) and Alexandra (76-67 B.C.)," Ibid. The date of the Pharisees predates even the reign of Hyrcanus. Josephus mentions the Pharisees' activities during the time of Jonathan (B. C. 161-143; *Antiquities of the Jews*, Bk. 13, Ch. 5, Sect. 7, Par. 161 and Sect. 9, Par. 171, in Whiston, 345, 346. For an excellent history of the Pharisees, see E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice & Belief, 66 BCE—66 CE* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992), 380-451.

[138]Joe Blair, *Introducing the New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 42.

upon for our information concerning the Pharisees: (1) Josephus, (2) the New Testament, and (3) rabbinic documents.

JOSEPHUS

The writings of Josephus (AD 37-100) help to shed light on Jesus' encounter with the religious leaders with their oral traditions. These oral traditions were later codified about AD 200.[139] The Pharisees built up a body of tradition that was as binding as the written Torah. Josephus in his *Antiquities of the Jews*, written about AD 94, wrote of the traditions of the Pharisees:

> What I would now explain is this, that the Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the law of Moses; and for that reason it is that the Sadducees reject them and say that we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory which are in the written word, but are not to observe what are derived from the tradition of our forefathers.[140]

The oral law was for the Pharisee equal to the written Law. As Frederick Murphy has written, "The Pharisees built up a substantial body of tradition that was as binding for them as written Torah. This tradition probably corresponds to the later rabbinic idea of oral Torah. For the rabbis oral Torah was an integral part of the Torah given to Moses on Sinai, but it was passed on orally through the generations."[141] The stress upon the Oral Torah by the Pharisees is what caused the Pharisees to confront Jesus about His disciples breaking the "tradition of the elders." Matthew preserves this encounter:

> Then some Pharisees and teachers of the law came to Jesus from Jerusalem and asked, "Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? They don't wash their hands before they eat!" Jesus replied, "And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, 'Honor your father and mother' and 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' But you say that if a man says to his father or mother, 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is a gift devoted to God,' he is not to 'honor his father' with it. Thus you nullify the word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.'" (Matthew 15:1-9)

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[139]See Rabbi Roy A. Rosenberg, *The Concise Guide to Judaism: History, Practice, Faith* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 67, where he says,

> The early tradition of the Pharisees had held that, while the written Torah was meant to be transmitted in written form, the oral Torah was not to be put in writing. The teachings of the sages were to be memorized, rather, and transmitted by word of mouth from scholar to scholar. It did not take long, of course, for the number of interpretations and decisions that constituted the oral Torah to become so vast that even the most brilliant scholars would have trouble recalling all of them (they also had to remember the names of the various sages who had originated or transmitted a decision). For this reason the head of the academy in the early years of the third century, Rabbi Judah the Nasi ("prince," or "patriarch"), resolved to reduce the oral Torah to writing. . . . Then about 220 A. D., he introduced the first authoritative summary of the rabbinic tradition to that date. This was the *Mishna* ("repetition"). The Mishna, based upon the laws of the Hebrew Bible, is the source of all subsequent Jewish law to the present day and is an object of study in the academies of all the forms of Judaism.

[140]See William Whiston, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, Bk. XIII, Ch. X, Sect. 6, Par. 297, in *The Works of Josephus*, New Updated Edition (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1987), 355.

[141]Frederick J. Murphy, *The Religious World of Jesus: An Introduction to Second Temple Palestinian Judaism* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), 223.

In the time of Christ, the Pharisees numbered about six thousand.[142] Josephus wrote about an incident that occurred during the time of Herod the Great (37 BC to AD 4), which states the approximate number of Pharisees during this time.

> (41) For there was a certain sect of men that were Jews, who valued themselves highly upon the exact skill they had in the law of their fathers, and made men believe they were highly favored by God, by whom this set of women were inveigled. These are those that are called the sect of the Pharisees, who were in a capacity of greatly opposing kings. A cunning sect they were, and soon elevated to a pitch of open fighting and doing mischief. (42) Accordingly, when all the people of the Jews gave assurance of their good will to Caesar, and to the king's government, these very men did not swear, being above six thousand; and when the king imposed a fine upon them, Pheroras's wife paid their fine for them.[143]

Before approaching the second source (New Testament) of our knowledge about the Pharisees, a comment by Scheindlin graphically captures the role that the Pharisees played during the reigns of John Hyrcanus (134-104 BC), Atistobulus I (104-103 BC), Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 BC), and Salome Alexandra (76-67 BC).

> Another group that was sometimes in opposition to the Hasmoneans was the Pharisees. They seem originally to have been non-priests who were eager to observe a strict rule of ritual purity and religious probity, and who therefore sometimes came into conflict with the authorities. Their leadership did not claim a cultic function, like the priests, but rather expertise in religious law and lore based on a body of religious traditions supplementary to the Torah, which they called 'the oral Torah. They laid stress on the obligation of each individual to observe religious practices of ever-increasing complexity and detail, rather than simply relying on the priesthood to accomplish the nation's religious duties vicariously by offering sacrifices on their behalf. By the first century C.E., their number included some priests and aristocrats as well.[144]

NEW TESTAMENT

This background of the Pharisees from Josephus sets the stage for a proper understanding of the role that the Pharisees played in their plot to ultimately destroy Jesus who posed a threat to their authority. To grasp Pharisaic history, we must not study Phariseeism in isolation from its historical roots and the strong political power this group yielded during the time of John Hyrcanus, the ministry of Jesus, and the academy established in Jamnia following the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. Jesus questioned their authority and this act got Him into trouble with the religious leaders.

As stated above the religion of the Pharisees is the religion of "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago" (Matthew 5:21). Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, dealt with the oral Torah of the Pharisees. This now-famous Sermon set the stage for the controversies that followed Jesus throughout His ministry. William David Davies (1911-2001), a pivotal figure in the fields of New Testament and Christian origins, aptly stresses the meaning of "You have heard" in his analysis of three passages in Matthew (12:1-14; 15:1-20; 19:1-

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[142]See N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 377, where he writes an interesting comment about the six thousand Pharisees:

> We do not know for sure how many Pharisees there were in the time of Jesus. The figure of six thousand, often quoted in this context from Josephus *Antiquities* 17.42, refers specifically to the Pharisees who refused to take the oath of allegiance to Caesar, sometime in the reign of Herod the Great. In the forty years or so between that incident and the time of Jesus several important political events had taken place, which might well have induced many more to join the movement. We may assume that there were in any case plenty of Pharisees who were not involved with the particular incident in question, and more again who were generally sympathetic to the movement.

[143]Josephus, *Antiquity of the Jews*, Bk. 17, Ch. 2, Sect. 4, Par. 41-42, in *Josephus*, 453. I am indebted to Frederick J. Murphy for this citation.

[144]Scheindlin, *Jewish People*, 40. His statement about "ever-increasing complexity" reminds one of Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees: "They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them" (Matthew 23:4).

19).[145] In the first citation (12:1-14), Jesus discusses the Pharisees' oral traditions about the Sabbath; in the second reference (15:1-20), Jesus again addresses the oral Torah of the Pharisees concerning the laws of purity; and in the third quotation (19:1-19), He addresses their traditions concerning divorce.

Jesus, in the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, warned His disciples about false prophets (7:15). Prior to this admonition, Jesus went right to the heart of oral traditions. This analysis and condemnation of the oral Torah of the Pharisees by Jesus is conceded by many modern day scholars. Davies, one such scholar, assesses the true intent of the Sermon on the Mount when he writes, "the SM itself is not set forth as a 'new', revolutionary Law, in sharp antithesis to that given on Sinai."[146] Again, Davies points out, with justice, that the "You have heard" but "I tell you" is Jesus' ethical demands set over against those of Judaism.[147] Gary Kilgore North (b. 1942), president of the institute of Christian Economics, also states the matter firmly: "The approach I have chosen here is to adopt Jesus' use of the technique, 'You have heard it said.' What He was attacking in each case was either a false tradition of the Pharisees or a false interpretation they imposed on an Old Testament text."[148]

Ed Glasscock does not overstate the case when he says, "Jesus was about to attack the oral interpretation of the law, which most Jews of the time had been conditioned to accept as the Law itself. Six times in the next few verses he will challenge their oral traditions."[149] Donald Alfred Hagner (b. 1936), ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church U.S.A.,[150] also notes that "By means of six bold antitheses representing the teaching of Jesus, Matthew now contrasts Jesus' exposition of the true and ultimate meaning of the Torah with the more common, rabbinic understandings of the commandments."[151]

The oral Torah was not codified until about AD 200.[152] Gary North illustrates through citations from the Mishnah and the Gemarah,[153] which is the codification of the oral Torah,[154] that there are contradictions

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[145]W. D. Davies, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 30.

[146]Ibid., 31.

[147]Ibid., 87.

[148]North, *Tradition*, 86. See also Greg L. Bahnsen, *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, expanded edition with replies to critics (New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co, 1984), where he says, "These radical commands (vv. 21-48) do not supercede the Older Testamental law; they illustrate and explain it. . . . The law demanded inner sanctification and its outward expression; the scribes and Pharisees disregarded the former and perverted the latter."

[149]Ed Glasscock, *Moody Gospel Matthew Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), 116.

[150] The following is a list of his accomplishments:

1964-66 Instructor in Greek, Fuller Theological Seminary
1969-70 Special Instructor in Bible, Wheaton College (Ill.)
1970-73 Assistant Professor of Biblical Studies, Wheaton College
1974-76 Associate Professor of Biblical Studies, Wheaton College
1970-76 Adjunct Professor, Wheaton College Graduate School
1970-71 Visiting Professor of New Testament, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School
1976-85 Associate Professor of New Testament, Fuller Theological Seminary
1978-93 Dean of the Young Life Summer Institute
1985-93 Professor of New Testament, Fuller Theological Seminary
1993- George Eldon Ladd Professor of New Testament, Fuller Theological Seminary

[151]Donald A. Hagner, Word Biblical Commentary, vol., 33a, *Matthew 1—13* (Dallas, Texas: Word Books Publisher, 1993), 111.

[152]See Rosenberg, *Judaism*, 67; Murphy, *Jesus*, 235.

[153]This combination is called the Babylonian Talmud.

[154]North, *Tradition*, 84-105. See also Adin Steinsaltz, *The Essential Talmud*, translated from the Hebrew by Chaya Galai (USA: Basic Books, 1976), where he explains the Talmud:

> The formal definition of the Talmud is the summary of oral law that evolved after centuries of scholarly effort by sages who lived in Palestine and Babylonia until the beginning of the Middle Ages. It has two main components: the Mishnah, a book of *halakhah* (law) written in Hebrew; and the commentary on the Mishnah, known as the Talmud (or Gemarah), in the limited sense of the word, a summary of discussion and elucidation of the Mishnah written in Aramaic-Hebrew jargon.

between the written Torah and the oral Torah. C. M. Pilkington comments on the origin of the oral Torah: "The collection we now have in the Mishnah was edited by Rabbi Judah the Prince (*Ha-Nasi*), who lived from 135 to 217 CE [common era]. . . . 'Oral' is indeed an apt description of the Torah which followed the written Torah because it was essentially a record of oral discussion in courtrooms and academies."[155]

The Pharisees were in revolt against God's written Law; that is, the oral law was on par with the written Law. The Jewish leaders carried out this rebellion in the name of God's Law. This melting together of the two laws caused Jesus to issue a scathing rebuke against the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees. Matthew succinctly captures one such confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees:

> Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are. Woe to you, blind guides! You say, "If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath." You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? You also say, "If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath." You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. (Matthew 23:15-27)

Jesus not only concludes His ministry with a scathing rebuke of the religious leaders, but He also began His ministry with a brief analysis of their rejection of the written Torah for their oral Torah. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus discusses the "You have heard" (oral Torah) with "but I say unto you" (written Torah). For an extra Biblical source (oral) of this kind of unbiblical reasoning can be found among Israel's religious leaders. For instance, Rabbi Eleazar issued a statement—following the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70—upon the meaning of "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh." His commentary is a classic example of "You have heard." The Babylonian Talmud gives the following comment about Eleazar's commentary: "R. Eleazar further stated: What is meant by the Scriptural text, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh? This teaches that Adam had intercourse with every beast and animal but found no satisfaction until he cohabited with Eve."[156] If Matthew had recorded this saying, we could also find Jesus' "but I say unto you": "Anyone who has sexual relations with an animal must be put to death" (Exodus 22:19).

The Pharisees with their oral Torah exercised tremendous political power before, during, and after the ministry of Christ. It is in this regard to political power that Rosenberg draws attention to the domination that the Pharisees had even over the Sadducees:

> Since the Sadducees were for the most part Temple priests and wealthy aristocrats, their influence over the people as a whole was rather limited, and during much of their existence they had to abide by the rulings and interpretations of the

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This explanation, however, though formally correct, is misleading and imprecise. The Talmud is the repository of thousands of years of Jewish wisdom, and the oral law, which is as ancient and significant as the written law (the Torah), finds expression therein.

[155]C. M. Pilkington, *Judaism* (US: NTC Publishing Group, 1995), 37. For a copy of the Mishnah, see Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

[156]See Babylonian Talmud, *Yebamoth 63a*, in *The Soncino Talmud* [CD-ROM]. Available from Davaka's Judaic Software, item no., Win CD #1W691B, call 1-800-621-8227 for this CD, cost $299.00, [accessed 3 November 2008]. I am indebted to North for this citation; see North, *Tradition*, 86-87. Also see North for many examples as illustrated above in his book, *Ibid. 84-105.*

Pharisees (This extended even to the procedures of the Temple sacrifices, although the chief priests were themselves Sadducees.) With the destruction of the Temple the Sadducees ceased to exist as a sect.[157]

Their power extended even to the control of the synagogues. This control also existed even in the time of Jesus. Even when many of the leaders of Israel believed on Jesus, still they would not confess Him for fear of being thrown out of the synagogues by the Pharisees. John, an apostle of Jesus, writes about the tremendous influence exercised by the Pharisees:

> Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God. (John 12:42-43)[158]

Paul, a Pharisee, sets an example of the hatred of the Pharisees against Christians. In the Philippian letter, he describes his ancestry and earlier behavior toward the church: "If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless" (Philippians 3:4-6).[159] Luke calls attention, in his book to Theophilus, to the hatred exercised by some Pharisees against the followers of Jesus. One such person that Luke identifies is Paul. Luke lets his readers know that prior to Paul's conversion that he gave his approval to the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1). Opposition to Stephen arose as a result of members from the "Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia" (6:9).

After the conversion of Paul, he, too, had to warn against the circumcision group (Titus 1:11). Paul tells Titus:

> They must be silenced, because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach—and that for the sake of dishonest gain. [12] Even one of their own prophets has said, "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons." [13] This testimony is true. Therefore, rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith [14] and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the commands of those who reject the truth. [15] To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted. [16] They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good. (Titus 1:11-16)

The Pharisees were a part of this circumcision group. When some men from Judea went to Antioch, they created problems by insisting that unless one was circumcised according to the Law of Moses, then one could not be saved (Acts 15:1). As a result of this controversy, a council met at Jerusalem (15:4). During the meeting of the church, which included the apostles and elders, Luke reports: "some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, 'The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses'" (15:5). The influence of the Pharisees remained a viable force throughout the ministry of Paul. The Pharisees were so strong that they managed to survive the destruction of Jerusalem and establish a school in Jamnia (in Galilee).

POST-AD 70 AND THE PHARISEES

Following the Jewish War, the center of Jewish life moved to Jabneh (in Greek, Jamnia) under the leadership of Johanan ben Zakkai. The priesthood, the sacrifices, and the temple worship ceased as a result of the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.[160] After AD 70, the terms "Pharisee" and "scribe" drop out of common

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[157] Rosenberg, *Judaism*, 61.

[158] See E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice & Belief 63 BCE—66 CE*, (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992), 388-412, for a detailed study of the influence and control the Pharisees had in the first century.

[159] See also Galatians 1:13f.; 1 Corinthians 15:9; Acts 8:3; 9:1, 21; 22:4, 19; 26:10f.; 1 Thessalonians 2:14f.; Galatians 4:29; 6:12.

[160] Lavinia and Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *A Popular Dictionary of Judaism* (Illinois: NTC Publishing Group, 1997), 87.

usage and is replaced with "rabbi." The Jewish leaders who survived the fall of Jerusalem gathered at Jamnia, in western Judea, and began studying the Torah.[161]

Johanan ben Zakkai, who opposed the war, managed to escape the city by letting it be understood that he was dead. The Romans allowed those in the city to carry out their dead in coffins and bury them outside the city. Once he was on the outside, he went to Vespasian who granted him the right to establish a school in Jamnia.[162] The religious leadership passed from the priesthood to the rabbis. Scheindlin calls attention to the important role that Johanan ben Zakkai played in establishing rabbinic Judaism following the destruction of Jerusalem. He writes,

> What had to be guaranteed was the religious tradition embodied in the Torah and in the ever-proliferating body of religious laws. Johanan ben Zakkai and his colleagues thus took an important step in reorganizing Judaism into rabbinic Judaism, the form of the religion most widespread until the present. Rabbinic Judaism centers on the constant study of the torah and the oral traditions associated with it and involves the meticulous observance of religious regulations, which are understood as constituting a legal system. By placing the study of the Torah at the center of Jewish religious life, the rabbis incidentally laid the foundation for the preoccupation of later Jewish culture with intellectual activities of all kinds.[163]

Thus concludes Lavinia and Cohn-Sherbok that "It was the pharisaic interpretation of the Law that survived and was continued in the work of the rabbis."[164] The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 did not destroy the political clout of the Pharisees. Even before the destruction of the Temple, the interpretive tradition was well developed. Rabbi Rosenberg says,

> Because this interpretive tradition was well developed by the time of the Temple's destruction in the great revolt, Judaism was able to survive. Since the largest portion of the people looked to the Pharisaic sages for guidance, the end of the sacrificial system in the Jerusalem temple could be accepted, for the Pharisees mandated other forms of religious expression that could take its place.[165]

Sanders' writings also collaborates the findings of Rosenberg: "The Hasidim (at the time of the Hasmonean revolt) were Pharisees, and the post-70 rabbis were Pharisees; throughout the whole period 175 BC to AD 135 the populace basically followed the Pharisees."[166] This history of the Pharisees before and after the destruction of Jerusalem helps us to understand more clearly the ones to whom the term "false prophets" refer in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) in His castigation of the religious leaders in Israel (Matthew 23) and in His Eschatological Discourse (Matthew 24).

JAMNIA

Some scholars espouse a date of AD 85-100 for the writing of the Gospel of Matthew.[167] This date is given in conjunction with the events that transpired in Jamnia ca. AD 90. This notion of a late date is advanced in order to maintain that Matthew's purpose in writing was to combat rabbinic Judaism in Jamnia. But D. A. Carson approaches the purpose and early date with caution: "It is unwise to specify too precise an occasion and purpose, because the possibility of error and distortion increases as one leaves hard evidence behind for

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[161]Albert A. Bell, *Exploring the New Testament World: An Illustrated Guide to the World of Jesus and the First Christians*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 37.

[162]Scheindlin, *Jewish People*, 52. See also Lavinia, "Johanan ben Zakkai," in *Judaism*, 88.

[163]Scheindlin, *Jewish People*, 53.

[164]Lavinia, "Pharisee," in *Judaism*, 134.

[165]Rosenberg, *Judaism*, 66.

[166]Sanders, *Judaism*, 400.

[167]See David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 48-55. See also Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol., 33a (Texas: Word Book, 1993), lxxiii—lxxv, for caution on both sides of the issue of dating. See also D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 75-81, for a conservative view on the provenance, date, and destination of the Gospel of Matthew.

supposition."[168] It appears, so it seems to me, that Matthew's Gospel is dealing with the establishment of the identity of Jesus, but in this identity, Matthew records many of the encounters between Jesus and the religious leaders. Matthew's Gospel sets forth the uneasy feelings between Jesus and the religious leaders. The Gospel is not so much anti-Jewish as it is anti-Jewish leaders in their conflict with Jesus the Messiah.[169]

Murphy asserts that Matthew rewrote the traditions to make the Pharisees look worse.[170] We cannot but be respectful to the suggestion, but difficulties remain with his presuppositions. He correctly assesses the events that surrounded Jamnia when he writes about the Pharisees and Jamnia, but when he asserts that this Gospel was written to combat rabbinic Judaism in Jamnia, he cites no concrete evidence to substantiate his allegations:

> After the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 CE, a group of Pharisees, scribes, and others gathered at Jamnia to restructure Jewish society in the absence of the Temple and its establishment. They confirmed the Torah as the center of the life of the Jewish people, and made Pharisaic interpretation normative for all. Torah teachers were now called rabbis. The budding Christian movement now faced not a multiplicity of groups, but a rabbinic Judaism that claimed that it alone was normative. This caused the Christians to define themselves over against rabbinic Judaism. Many have seen the activity at Jamnia as the background against which to read the Gospel of Matthew.[171]

As noted above from the writings of Josephus and the New Testament, it goes almost without saying that Phariseeism dominated pre-70 Judaism as well as post-70 rabbinic Judaism. There are substantial continuities between them concerning an emphasis on non-biblical or oral traditions.[172] The Gospel of Matthew is a book of conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders during His ministry. Jamnia does confirm the entrenchment that the Pharisees had during Jesus' ministry. They never lost their zeal for the traditions of the elders—before and after the destruction of Jerusalem. Sanders also calls attention to the name change of the Pharisees following the destruction of the Jerusalem: "After the destruction of Jerusalem, they led the reconstruction of Judaism, giving up their party name, becoming more catholic, and taking the title 'rabbis', 'teachers'."[173]

This treatise on tradition has only skimmed the surface in the area for a proper methodology of rediscovering the Bible. The religious leaders in Jesus' day, especially the Pharisees, were so politically strong that even with the destruction of Jerusalem, they were able to regroup in Jamnia and solidify their oral traditions in written form—the Babylonian Talmud. These were the traditions that Jesus addressed in His Sermon on the Mount. These were the traditions that Jesus had to confront over and over in His ministry to the nation of Israel. Is it any wonder that He cautioned His disciples about the "leaven of the Pharisees"? Just as Josiah rediscovered the Bible for himself and the nation of Judah, so today Christians need to rediscover the Bible as it discloses God's scheme of redemption in and through Jesus Christ. Justo L. Gonzalez (b. 1937), retired Latino Methodist historian and theologian, and Catherine G. Gonzalez, ordained Presbyterian minister and Professor of Church History at Columbia Theological Seminary, correctly state: "We must learn to reevaluate and reinterpret what has been handed down to us."[174] Once more, their analysis of restoring the Bible to its right place is full of insight: "They were so used to reading the Bible as they had been taught by generations of interpreters that any questioning of that interpretation seemed to be a questioning of Scripture itself."[175]

The next chapter (Chapter 5) draws attention to the need to reread many texts of Scripture through "new eyes." This chapter (5) examines the principles of biblical situation ethics in light of numerous examples from the Old Testament books in order to draw upon principles to make judgments concerning issues that Christians

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[168]D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in Frank E. Gaebelein, vol., 8, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 22.

[169]Carson, "Matthew," in *Bible Commentary*, 20.

[170]Murphy, *Jesus*, 232.

[171]Ibid., 234.

[172]Sanders, *Judaism*, 413.

[173]Ibid., 412.

[174]Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching: the Pulpit and the Oppressed* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980), 31.

[175]Ibid., 30.

are divided over today. The title of this chapter is “Graded Absolutism.” In a nut-shell, graded absolutism simply states that when two laws come into conflict, one law may give way to another law.

There are circumstances in which “mercy” takes precedence, often times, over law. Graded absolutism holds that there are more absolutes than one. It is the pyramid of values in accordance with God’s own nature. Each particular command of God is absolute in its own sphere. There is a hierarchy of laws within God’s kingdom. In other words, some laws take precedence over other laws. There are times in which *mercy* takes the lead over law. When two laws appear to conflict with one another, the higher law, so it appears, take supremacy over the lower law. What does graded absolutism mean? These are questions that the next chapter seeks to deal with—old texts through new eyes.

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Graded Absolutism

> The Church 'has' the Word, and yet it must always receive it anew, if it is actually to proclaim it. . . . So the Church built up a mighty apparatus, a system of ecclesiastical assurances, by means of which it might become the power in control of the divine revelation. The authority of the divine Word was seized (so to speak) and made available in an ecclesiastical system of authority. The Church of faith and the free-governing grace of God became the Church of the holy episcopal cannon law. The authority of the Word of God was delegated to this legal apparatus of the Church, and the crown of this system of assurances is the Papacy. When the Pope speaks, God speaks.[176]

When we reflect upon "situation ethics," we must distinguish between biblical situation ethics and humanist situation ethics. Is everything always "black" or "white"? Are there ever any gray areas? Is there such a thing as "graded absolutism"? In other words, do some laws take precedence over other laws? Is there ever a time in which *mercy* takes the lead over law? Can one be guilty of legalism in dealing with others? When two laws appear to conflict with one another, does the higher law take supremacy over the lower law? What does "graded absolutism" mean? These are questions that this chapter seeks to deal with.

To begin this study, it will be helpful to briefly observe two men of distinction who have addressed themselves to the subject of "situation ethics" without differentiating between biblical and humanist situation ethics. Dave Miller,[177] Executive Director of Apologetics Press, and Bert Thompson,[178] former director of Apologetics Press, a creationist organization, from the 1980s to 2005, wrote articles about Matthew 12:1-8 from which they drew certain conclusions about "situation ethics." Both men seek to preserve the Word of God as applicable to every area of our lives—and everyone must seek this same obedience. In their analysis of Matthew 12 and "situation ethics," it appears, so it seems to me, that they are arguing against Joseph Fletcher's "situation ethics"[179] rather than biblical "situation ethics."

Everyone is a situational ethicist. Even Dave Miller and Bert Thompson cannot escape applying the principles of situational ethics to certain aspects of their own lives. All people make decisions upon the existential situation. The distinction between Fletcher's ethics and biblical ethics is as far apart as the East is from the West. In our day, the phrase "situation ethics" does not communicate adequately the truths binding upon God's children. Since "situation ethics" convey negative overtones, perhaps another term may express more fittingly the truths contained in the Scriptures, namely, "graded absolutism."[180] This expression conveys more accurately the teachings of God for our society and culture. How we phrase certain truths or untruths

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[176]Emil Brunner, *The Divine-Human Encounter* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1943), 25.

[177]See Dave Miller, "Matthew 12 and Situation Ethics," *Firm Foundation* 105 (December, 1988): 1, 6.

[178]See Bert Thompson, "Did Jesus Teach Situation Ethics?," *The Spiritual Sword* 45, no. 3 (April 1991): 3-6. Thompson is no longer director of Apologetics Press.

[179]See Joseph Fletcher: *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966). For an excellent analysis of Flethcher's' Situation Ethics, see Joseph Fletcher (1905-1991), American professor who founded the theory of situational ethics in the 1960s, and John Warwick Montgomery (b. 1931), Emeritus Professor of Law and Humanities, University of Bedfordshire, England, *Situation Ethics* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Dimension Books, 1972). This book is a transcript of a public dialogue between Professor Joseph Fletcher and Dr. John Warwick Montgomery. See John Warwick Montgomery's website: www.jwm.christendom.co.uk for background information on Montgomery.

[180]Graded absolutism holds that there are more absolutes than one. It is the pyramid of values in accordance with God's own nature. Each particular command of God is absolute in its own sphere. There is a hierarchy of laws within God's kingdom.

often hinges upon clichés employed to convey the truth or untruth intended. In other words, word groups can be very deceptive.

PHRASEOLOGY

In analyzing "situation ethics," it is necessary that we consider the appropriateness of certain expressions to express adequately the concept of biblical situation ethics. Since slogans, or phrases, are a part of our culture, we may attach good or sinister motives. Expressions may be good or bad depending upon the situation. Sayings communicate or describe thoughts or events. Clichés may be utilized to cover some clandestine operation—that is, some heinous, abhorrent, abominable, atrocious, inhuman, monstrous crime.

Gay Individuals

To illustrate the above paragraph, one only needs to reflect upon certain terms that no longer convey the same type imagery that it did just a few years ago. Presently we do not dare speak of an individual as "gay." Originally the word had a good connotation (implied meaning). For instance, a few years ago, when we spoke of a person as "gay," we simply meant that person was radiant, animated, and lively. But now, when we refer to a person as "gay," we have reference to his or her sexual preference. The word "gay" now identifies individuals that are homosexual, bisexual, or effeminate.[181] Even though this word "gay" is still an excellent word, nevertheless, this word must be used with caution.

Freedom of Choice

Another slogan that has a good ring is "freedom of choice." There is nothing wrong in-and-of-itself concerning this idiom, but, on the other hand, the pro-abortionist advocates (those in favor of murdering the unborn) choose this cliché to advocate an individual's right to kill one's baby if she so desires. Freedom of choice, so it is maintained, is everyone's right, so defends the pro-abortionist.[182]

Illegal Use of Words in Hitler's Germany

To cite another example, John S. Powell demonstrates forcefully the illegal use of words to cover sinister operations in Hitler's Germany.[183] He exhibits the ideas of "newspeak" as presented in George Orwell's books *1984*[184] and *Animal Farm*.[185] Powell captures graphically the ideas of George Orwell's (1903-1950) depiction of the illegal use of phrases to cover-up one's terribly harmful motives. Powell tells of the "Killing Centers" that Adolf Hitler (1889-1945) organized to exterminate the undesirables.[186] The amazing thing about Hitler's clandestine operation was the euphemistic terms he adopted to camouflage the exterminating centers.

One such organization established for the extermination of the sick and disabled, he called the "Realm's Work Committee of Institutions for Cure and Care."[187] Another establishment, devoted exclusively to the killing of children, was known by the name of "Realm's Committee for Scientific Approach to Severe Illness

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[181]John Ayto, *Dictionary of Word Origins* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1990), 251, writes: "The 20th century sense 'homosexual,' which first came into general usage in the 1950s, seems to have arisen from an earlier American slang term *gay cat*, which originally denoted a young male tramp who was the companion of an older tramp. The implications of a homosexual relationship which this carried had led by the 1930s to the use of *gay cat* for any young male homosexual, and the application of *gay* to 'homosexual' was probably generalized from this."

[182]See Jean Staker Garton, *Who Broke the Baby?* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany Fellowship, 1979), 13-19 for an excellent treatment of "Seduction by Semantics."

[183]See John S. Powell, *Abortion: The Silent Holocaust* (Texas: Argus Communications, 1981).

[184] See George Orwell, *1984* (New York: Penguin Books, 1983).

[185]See George Orwell, *Animal Farm* (New York: New American Library, 1946).

[186]Powell, *Abortion: The Silent Holocaust*, 30-39.

[187]Ibid., 31.

Due to Heredity and Constitution."[188] A third group, who processed questionnaires for these organizations, was called the "Charitable Transport Company for the Sick."[189] Finally, another agency, which collected the cost of the killings from the families, was called the "Charitable Foundation for Institutional Care."[190]

The organizational names that Hitler gave to the "killing centers" were names that had a "good ring" to the concerned, but he misused the wording in the same way that Fletcher prostituted the expression "situation ethics." Since Joseph Fletcher (1905-1991), an American professor who founded the theory of situational ethics in the 1960s, has given an un-biblical connotation to this phrase,[191] then, we need to choose a term that will more adequately express the teachings of God whenever we confront a situation in which we must make a choice between two absolutes or between "mercy" or "law." When we make a choice between two absolutes, this alternative is known as "graded absolutism."[192]

The Scriptures provide many examples of "graded absolutism." Often the selection that we make between two moral duties depends on the situation. In other words, we are exempt from our duty to the "lower law" by virtue of our obedience to the "higher law." It is not that we do not believe in God's absolutes, but we believe that under certain conditions, some laws are "weightier"[193] than other laws (Matthew 23:23). Did not Jesus speak of the "least" and the "greatest"[194] commandments (Matthew 5: 19)?

SITUATION ETHICS

The above background concerning the improper utilization of expressions calls for further elaboration about the slogan "situation ethics." This designation in-and-of-itself is not bad terminology; but, like many other good sayings, it has received an ill-conceived connotation, that is to say, everything goes. In spite of its misuse, "Few positions are totally without any merit. There is usually enough truth in any false view to make it hold [some] water" writes Norman Geisler (b. 1932).[195] At the moment, "situational ethics" is a theory of knowledge that does not believe that there are any moral absolutes by which men and women are to be governed.[196] To state it more forcefully, the situationist believes that "man is the center of all things." That is to say, man is his own God; he himself decides what is right and what is wrong.[197] Man becomes his own God.[198] Every Christian must reject this atheistic philosophy—a philosophy that is totally destructive to any society.[199]

It is necessary for us to make a distinction between biblical situation ethics and humanistic situation ethics. In biblical situation ethics, we seek to make application to various circumstances founded upon biblical principles, not simply that the "end justifies the means." To accomplish biblical situation ethics, we must search

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[188]Ibid.

[189]Ibid., 32.

[190]Ibid.

[191]Fletcher, *Situation Ethics*, 120: "Only the end justifies the means; nothing else."

[192]Graded absolutism, unlike situation ethics, does not approve of wife-swapping, adultery to get out of prison, blasphemy, abortion of unwanted babies, harlotry to teach maturity, nor premarital intercourse.

[193]KJV

[194]KJV

[195]Norman Geisler, *Christian Ethics: Options and Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 34.

[196]Fletcher, *Situation Ethics*, 120-133.

[197]I highly recommend Ravi Zacharias, *Deliver Us from Evil: Restoring the Soul in a Disintegrating Culture* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1996), for an in-depth study of men and women acting as if they themselves are gods.

[198]For an excellent treatise on moral absolutes, see Ravi Zacharias, *The Real Face of Atheism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004). See also Zacharias, in his book *Can Man Live Without* God (Dallas: Word, 1994), 23, where he gives a classic example of a life without moral absolutes. He writes about his visit to Poland when he was taken to the Nazi death camps of Auschwitz and Birkenau and found on a wall the following inscription by Hitler that sets forth the grim results of a live lived without moral absolutes:

> I freed Germany from the stupid and degrading fallacies of conscience and morality. . . . We will train young people before whom the world will tremble. I want young people capable of violence—imperious, relentless and cruel.

[199]For a thorough investigation and analysis of this philosophy ("man is the center of all things"), I recommend Norman L. Geisler, *Is Man the Measure?: An Evaluation of Contemporary Humanism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983).

for terminology that will more adequately define or express God's standards. One such phrase is "graded absolutism." This designation expresses more accurately the idea of biblical situation ethics as expressed in the Bible. In other words, "graded absolutism" is simply the "person-in-the-situation" as taught in Holy Scripture.

GRADED ABSOLUTISM

In "graded absolutism," there are higher and lower moral laws.[200] In other words, not all moral laws are of equal weight. Jesus spoke, as mentioned above, of the "more important matters of the law"[201] (Matthew 23:23) and of the "least" (5:19) and of the "greatest"[202] (22:36). From these three citations of Scripture, we observe that moral laws are hierarchically graded, that is to say, there are various levels in moral laws. Since there are different levels in moral laws, there may be times in which moral conflicts are unavoidable. In other words, there are times in which we cannot obey both commands of God simultaneously.

We are commanded to submit to God and to civil authorities, but what happens when these two powers come into conflict? There are times in which we cannot conform to both at the same time. As we seek the proper resolution to our dilemmas, the solutions are not always the easiest thing to learn or to ascertain. Since our knowledge is imperfect, we must not be dogmatic in our decisions. Norman Geisler (1932-2019), Christian apologist and the co-founder of Southern Evangelical Seminary, correctly states the difficulty:

> An absolutist often overstates one's case, acting as though one has an absolute understanding of absolutes. Antinomians [those without law] make a contribution to ethics by stressing the relative dimension. Finite man does not have an infinite understanding of the infinite. Paul said, "now I know in part" (1 Cor. 13:12). The basic ethical principles are absolute, but our human perspective on them is less than absolute. In pointing to our changing understanding of God's unchanging moral law, antinomians have rendered an unwitting service to Christian ethics.[203]

God and Civil Government

To explain by example the concept of "graded absolutism," consider the following biblical problem of two absolutes in conflict: (1) our responsibility to obey government, and (2) our responsibility to obey God. Paul says, "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God" (Romans 13:1). This is the law of God. Everyone must submit to government. But are there no exemptions to this absolute?[204] An example of the "exemption" concept is the tax laws of the US government. Often the government will make an "exemption" from the tax laws because of particular situations, but the law still stands. The United States government made exemptions for filing tax returns for the service men while in Saudi, Arabia. Nevertheless, the tax law is still absolute in its intended meaning.

Christians are commanded by God to submit to governing authorities. This command from God is an absolute truth. What do we resolve to carry out if the governing authorities demand compliance with things that are contrary to loyalty to God's commandments? In seeking a solution to the above dilemma, we must turn to the Scriptures for clarification. The Bible addresses itself to the concept of two absolutes coming into conflict with one another. For example, the case of Peter and John are called forth to enhance the dilemma of two supreme laws coming into friction. Peter and John were summoned before the Sanhedrin, who then "commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus"; but they answered, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God" (Acts 4:18-19). They faced a dilemma. What should be done in such a difficulty? Should they obey God or man? They obeyed the higher law, namely, submission to God; thus, the apostles resolved the conflict. Geisler correctly states, "God is the one absolute

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[200]I am indebted for much of this discussion to Geisler, *Christian Ethics*, 113-132.

[201]The KJV renders this as: "weightier *matters* of the law."

[202]The KJV renders this as: "greatest commandment."

[203]Geisler, *Christian Ethics*, 35.

[204]In using "exemption" rather than "exception," one seeks to maintain the absoluteness of the law. See Geisler, *Christian Ethics*, 110 for an excellent examination of this distinction.

basis for all laws that reflect His nature, and each law is absolutely binding on the particular activity it governs."[205]

Truth Telling versus False Telling

Rahab the Harlot

To cite another case dealing with biblical situation ethics, one should reflect upon Rahab's "false telling" versus "truth telling," which stands as a classic. What should she have done? Should she have practiced deception to save the spies? What was right? What was wrong? What would you have done? Should we always tell the truth despite circumstances? Hasn't everyone been confronted with the dilemma of when to tell or when not to tell the truth? Are there ever any "exemptions" to the command not to tell falsehoods? Does God withhold accountability from the person who demonstrates mercy to the innocent rather than truth telling to the guilty? What does the Word of God assert concerning mercy to the innocent instead of "truth telling" to the guilty?

Before we seek an answer to Rahab's predicament, we should observe what God has said about fabrication. God, through Moses, commanded that one "shall not give false testimony against your neighbor" (Exodus 20:16). Paul also writes that we "must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor" (Ephesians 4:25). Again, Solomon says that "The LORD detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful" (Proverbs 12:22). Now, on the other hand, the Bible records circumstances in which lying was practiced in order to save lives. Were the above Scriptures violated in the actions of Rahab?

Can we deceive and still be innocent? Rahab is one such person who exhibited "mercy showing" rather than "truth telling" to the guilty. Rahab hid the spies, who were involved in espionage, from Israel's enemies and then lied to save their lives (Joshua 2:1-7). Did she sin? Did she apply in principle biblical law and truth to the situation? Was she mixed up in "situation ethics"? It seems that God withheld accountability and rewarded her for her "mercy showing" to the people of God rather than "truth telling" to God's enemies. She practiced what Jesus condemned the Pharisees for not considering—"I desire mercy, not sacrifice" (Matthew 12:7).

In spite of her deception, God immortalized her in the Book of Hebrew's "Hall of Fame" (Hebrews 11:31). Nowhere does the Bible condemn her for her actions. In fact she is listed in the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:5). Her performance was an integral part of mercy[206] with which God was pleased. God is a God of mercy.[207] In evaluating her difficulty, we must weigh the totality of God's Word. We should reflect upon the words of the prophet Micah in his admonition to the children of Israel: "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). Again, we should reflect upon the words of Jesus to the religious leaders: "If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent" (Matthew 12:7).

Since God desires mercy more than sacrifice, then, it should not be surprising to us that mercy takes the lead over law. This revelation of God's kindness should come as a relief to all. For one to comprehend the implications of "truth telling" versus "false telling" and the superiority of one absolute over another absolute, we only need to read the story of Corrie Ten Boom (1892-1983) who lied to the Nazis to save the lives of Jews.

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[205]Ibid., 95.

[206]See Jesus' illustrations concerning "mercy" taking precedence over "law," in Matthew 12:1-8. Even though Jesus did not address Rahab in His confrontation with the religious leaders, nevertheless, there is still the same principle of mercy taking precedence over law.

[207]Jonah's conversation with God is an excellent example of God's mercy:

> But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. [2] He prayed to the LORD, 'O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.' (Jonah 4:1-3)

Her deceptions were not evil, but good. Parallels are present between the ***then*** (Rahab) and the ***now*** (Corrie Ten Boom).

The Hebrew Midwives

Another first-class illustration of circumstances determining the direction one should follow is the Hebrew narrative about the Hebrew midwives' deception to Pharaoh. Moses chronicles this narrative in his second book of the Pentateuch:

> The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, "When you help the Hebrew women in childbirth and observe them on the delivery stool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live." The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, "Why have you done this? Why have you let the boys live?" The midwives answered Pharaoh, "Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive." So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. (Exodus 1:15-20)

This is another instance of God withholding accountability from individuals who demonstrate "mercy" to the innocent rather that "truth telling" to the guilty. As cited above, Jesus forcefully set forth this truth when He cites the Older Testament along with his comments: "If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent" (Matthew 12:7).

God's absolute about falsehood still stands—"Truth telling" and "mercy showing" are both grounded in God's nature. In God there are no conflicts between these two attributes—"mercy showing" and "truth telling." With men and women though, there are often conflicts between the two. The problem we face is that occasionally we cannot perform both simultaneously. But, on the other hand, God, in such cases, withholds accountability from the person who demonstrates "mercy" to the innocent rather than "truth telling" to the guilty. Geisler goes right to the heart of the matter in his observation concerning lying in preference to "truth telling" versus "mercy showing" when he writes:

> Some would prefer calling this not a "lie" but an "intentional falsification." Call it what we will, it does not change the fact that it would be morally wrong—unless, of course, one is obeying a higher moral law in so doing. I prefer calling it a "lie" so that it is clearly understood that lying as such (without a higher conflicting law) is wrong.[208]

The three examples presented above about (**1**) "God and Government," (**2**) "Rahab and the Spies," and the (**3**) "Hebrew Midwives" illustrate that some absolutes are higher than other absolutes. There are graded levels of moral commands in Scripture. Not all moral laws are of equal weight (Matthew 23:23[209]; 5:19[210]). We must never forget that there may be occasions in which mercy takes priority over law. We have a moral obligation to search the Scriptures in every conflicting situation. Every text must be set in conversation with the whole Bible. Leroy Garrett (1918-2015), professor and former editor and publisher of *Restoration Review*) captures the essence of the "greatest" versus the "least" in his essay, "What I Believe about Situation Ethics."

> Most, if not all, moral problems are solved in part by a reference to it all depends, i.e., it all depends on the situation. Is it right to deceive? Is it right to drive in excess of the speed limit? Is it right to break into your neighbor's house? . . . It is the person in the situation that makes the difference, which means that the view I am defending might better be called "Person-in-the-situation" ethics . . . There is in moral thought a concept known as the "principle of necessity," which says

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[208]Norman Geisler, *Options in Contemporary Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 91.

[209] "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former."

[210] "Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven."

that if it is necessary to act contrary to laws that one would ordinarily honor in order to help someone in an emergency situation, then "what is necessary" takes precedence over law.[211]

"What is necessary" often requires one law taking precedence over another law or, to state it another way, mercy often takes priority over another known absolute. Remember that laws are made for our well-being, not men and women for law. Again, we should recall Jesus' philosophy of "mercy" taking precedence over "law" in his confrontation with the religious leaders who practiced law over mercy. Mark adds additional information to this episode in which Jesus rebukes the leaders of Israel for their lack of mercy:

> One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. [24] The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" [25] He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? [26] In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions." [27] Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. [28] So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath." (Mark 2:23-28)

What is the difference between the humanistic situation ethics of Joseph Fletcher and the biblical situation ethics of Christians? With Fletcher the circumstances determine what is right or wrong.[212] On the other hand, the Christian does not allow the situation to decide what is right or wrong, but, rather, he or she simply allows the situation to assist one in discovering which moral law applies in a difficulty. We must look at the facts and then determine which law of God should be obeyed—or mercy extended. We should not be guilty of: "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God" (Matthew 22:29).

Geisler is on target when he says, "graded absolutism holds that there are more absolutes than one."[213] He makes a distinction between the situation ethics of the Bible (graded absolutism) and the situation ethics (antinomianism—without law) of Fletcher.[214] Geisler says,

> Fletcher believes that the situation determines what one should do in a given case; graded absolutism holds that situational factors only help one to discover what God has determined that we should do. That is, the situation does not fill an empty absolute with content and thereby determine what one would do. Rather, the situational factors merely help one discover which command of God is applicable to that particular case. . . . It is true that occasionally the conclusions are the same, but they are based on very different reasons. Hence, the similarities are only accidental and not essential. Fletcher concludes something is right or wrong because the "existential particularities" of the situation determine it; graded absolutism, on the other hand, concludes something is right or wrong because God has declared it.[215]

MATTHEW 12: GRADED ABSOLUTISM

Jesus sets biblical situational ethics, or graded absolutism, forth in His encounter with the Pharisees.

> At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. [2] When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath." [3] He answered, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? [4] He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. [5] Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? [6] I tell you that one[a] greater than the temple is here. [7] If you had known what these words mean, 'I

[211]Leroy Garrett, "What I Believe About Situation Ethics," *Restoration Review*, vol. 12, no. 10 (December 1988), 150-51.

[212]Fletcher, *Situation Ethics*, 134-45.

[213]Geisler, *Options in Contemporary Christian Ethics*, 93.

[214]Geisler prefers the expression "graded absolutism" to "situation ethics" because of its current usage—everything goes. The expression "situation ethics" today represents a philosophy that is anti-God. In other words, a belief that there are no absolutes, everything is relative. For example, there is no such thing as right and wrong, that is to say, good or evil.

[215]Geisler, *Options in Contemporary Christian Ethics*, 93.

[a] Or *something*; also in verses 41 and 42

desire mercy, not sacrifice,'[b] you would not have condemned the innocent. [8] For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." (Matthew 12:1-8)

Since Matthew 12 is called forth as testimony to represent biblical "situation ethics," or "graded absolutism," then, it is essential that we carefully analyze this pericope (section). Does this segment of Scripture teach "graded absolutism"? In seeking an answer, we must not confuse the teachings of Fletcher with the teachings of Christ. "Situation ethics" based upon the philosophy of Fletcher must be rejected—it is anti-God. But if our idea of ethics is not humanistic in origin but biblical in origin, then, there is no reason to deny the plain teachings of the Scriptures. Some Christians think such a position changes God's Law for the sake of convenience.

Dave Miller, as cited above, complains about the position many Christians take concerning biblical situation ethics. He apparently does not consider an alternative phrase to express the truths of God more accurately for our culture. Miller asserts:

> A favorite "proof test" of the situation ethicist and, increasingly, of the libertine within the church, is the incident recorded in Matthew 12:1-9. . . . Some have suggested this passage teaches that times arise within the Christian's life when he must break the "letter of the law" to keep the "spirit of the law." They maintain that Jesus permits us to violate His will at times for the sake of convenience. If compliance with His words becomes inconvenient, then those words may be treated as optional. . . . For them, right and wrong, truth and error are obscure, blurred, hazy, gray, and complex. What is wrong in one situation may be right and acceptable in another. [216]

It is obvious that Miller overstates his case; he also accuses, without evidence, other believers of manipulation of the Law of God to justify one's own selfish ends. In other words, Miller charges other Christians with blatant disregard for God's Word by saying, "If I do not like what God said, then, I will violate the law to accomplish my desired ends so that I am obeying the 'spirit of the law.'" Is this the philosophy of believers? I think not! We do not, and must not, advocate the breaking of God's Law "for the sake of convenience." He makes this assertion, without facts to substantiate his allegations, against other believers who rely upon Jesus' teachings in Matthew 12 to draw conclusions that differ with his. These Christians are not guilty of saying, as Miller does, "right and wrong, truth and error are obscure, blurred, hazy, gray, and complex." He exaggerates his concern.

THE HERMENEUTICAL APPROACH FROM *THEN* TO *NOW*

An interpreter is often confronted with the hermeneutical question of how to relate the circumstances in life to the situational ethics in the Bible—from ***then*** to ***now***. It is obvious that every interpreter must make the hermeneutical jump from the ***then*** of the Scriptures to the ***now*** of the present. This jump must be made on the analogy of Scripture, that is to say, by the principles set forth by the Holy Spirit, not man's ingenuity to violate Scripture as did the Pharisees (Matthew 15:1-13). This in-built process of clarification and correction of our interpretation is accomplished through apparent analogies and similarities. As we read the Book of Matthew, we discover broad principles set forth to assist us in our interpretation of difficult situations.

An exploration of Matthew's description of Christ's confrontation with the religious leaders is most helpful in seeking biblical answers to friction (see Matthew 12:1-8). For us to be "biblical" in applying the principles set forth by Jesus do not mean that we have to create the same conflicts in order to give the same answers. To illustrate the above principle of "situational ethics," five additional subjects will be explored to demonstrate the principles set forth by Jesus in Matthew 12:

- monetary assistance to unbelievers

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[b] Hosea 6:6

[216] Miller, "Matthew 12 and Situation Ethics," 6.

- assistance to someone in need on Sunday
- divorce for other causes than adultery
- observance of the Passover at a different time frame than authorized by God
- two brothers who violated God's Law, but not condemned.

Monetary Assistance to Unbelievers

Paul encouraged the Galatians to "do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Galatians 6:10). This is a case for "situation ethics." If we can help only one family or individual—one family belongs to God and the other does not—what criteria must be exercised in determining our judgment? This decision presents a predicament for us. We must choose one or the other. How do we resolve the problem? In this case, the situation resolves the outcome. We make judgments upon the circumstances—everyone is a situational ethicist, whether we like it or not! This illustration may be somewhat overly simplified. To illustrate, let everyone think about some uncertainties that are more convoluted in nature. The next issue is a little more intricate in nature, but not extremely so. Nevertheless, assistance to someone in need on Sunday may take precedence over the instructions not to forsake the assembly (Hebrews 10:25, KJV).

Sunday Morning Assembly

If one is on his or her way to the assembly on Sunday morning to meet with the saints and comes across a very bad automobile accident, what action should be taken by the believer who applies Hebrews 10:25 to the Sunday morning assembly? Should he or she continue the journey to the Sunday morning assembly or should one give assistance rather than continue on the journey so that one does not violate the command to meet?[217] If one chooses to place a human being above the Sunday service because of the circumstances, then, this conduct is grounded on situational ethics. In this scenario, the qualifying factors regulate one's actions—forsake the assembly or render help. Is this biblical? Is this action based upon situational ethics? To return to the story of David (1 Samuel 21:1-6; Matthew 12:1-8), we recall that David's situation resulted in extreme hunger for himself and his men; but his hunger and need took priority over sacred ritual. David's incidence is the ***then*** and the automobile accident is the ***now.***

Divorce for Other Causes than Adultery

Should we ever apply the righteousness of mercy to an individual caught in a marriage that is "hell on earth"? Should one have to stay in a marriage in which the husband physically abuses the wife and children? Can we draw principles from the story of David in Matthew 12 to the subject of divorce for other reasons than sexual immorality? It appears, so it seems, that a close scrutiny of some marriages demand that the standard of "mercy" takes precedence over "law." Is it possible that the state of affairs is the determining factor in deciding whether or not one can divorce for other reasons than sexual immorality?

The question of divorce is a puzzling uncertainty to many Christians. Even though divorce is a very perplexing predicament, we still need to come out of the closet and deal with the problems that people face daily—the ***now***. There are no "pat answers" to all of the problems that we face in everyday life that are beyond our control. We should be realistic in our approach to divorce. The "nuts and bolts" of life must be dealt with. The topic of divorce and remarriage is much more complex than we wish to admit. There are no "pat answers." Since sin is a part of the society, we must seek answers for solutions to the divorce dilemma from principles set forth in Holy Scripture.

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[217]I am granting the traditional interpretation of Hebrews 10:25 that teaches one cannot miss an assembly on Sunday morning. Although this Scripture is relied upon by many Christians to teach that one must not skip a Sunday morning service, still it must be brought to the attention of the reader that this verse does not teach that interpretation. This Scripture teaches that one must not abandon, give up, or toss aside. This Scripture, too, is an old text that needs to be reexamined through new eyes.

Can we conceive of any circumstance in which divorce would be acceptable to God without sexual immorality on the part of one of the partners? Do we say NO? Did Jesus intend to teach that there are no grounds for divorce other than fornication or adultery? When Matthew, Mark, and Luke recorded the divorce sayings of Jesus, did they have in view that His words were a dissertation on the subject of divorce and remarriage? What about wife abuse, husband abuse, child abuse, desertion, murder, armed robbery, and so on? Are these justifiable reasons for divorce? These are issues that need to be answered! Perhaps, a biblical concept of situational ethics or graded absolutism will help to determine the proper course of action. Is there any justification for applying the principle of "mercy" over "law" as set forth by Jesus in His confrontation with the religious leaders (Matthew 12:1-8)?

It is easy for us to answer emphatically—"no other cause than fornication." For many Christians, if one is the victim of ill-treatment or extreme brutality that is still not a sufficient biblical cause for divorce. In seeking answers to many complex issues, we must rely upon God's Revelation in its totality, not just proof-texting. We must rely upon God's Word, the standard by which all things must be judged, in judging the principles of right and wrong. When we limit divorce only to sexual immorality, we create impossible situations for the innocent victim.[218]

To set the stage for the principle of "mercy" over "law," I present two stories about murder and wife abuse. These two stories illustrate the "person-in-the-situation" in order to focus upon the words of Jesus in Matthew 12. These two accounts are about the trauma two women experienced with their husbands who were involved in some "unclean thing."[219] These two dilemmas should shock us into the reality of the heinousness of sin in this depraved world and the predicament these two women found themselves.

CASE ONE. According to a police report, two men (Grady Gibson and Eddie Hart) conspired to kill the wife of Eddie to collect insurance money. This young woman was taken out into the woods, tied to a tree, and almost decapitated by Grady Gibson. He did not have sex with her; he simply killed her by almost cutting off her head. Both men, after two years of investigation by the Montgomery Police Department (Alabama), were convicted of murder. Eddie Hart, the husband of the dead woman, received a sentence of fifty years; but the other man received life without parole. He is in for life! Now, the question: Is Mrs. Gibson [220]bound to her husband, Grady Gibson, for the rest of her life simply because he did not have sex with the woman he murdered—he almost cut her head off? Does she have scriptural grounds to divorce him and remarry, even though adultery was not committed? Some say yes, others say no.

Since Mrs. Gibson's husband is incarcerated in prison for life, without a chance for parole, what is her situation in regards to divorce and remarriage? Is she bound to him for life since he did not pull off her panties and have sex with her? To begin with, Mrs. Gibson did file a motion (July 7, 1988) with the Circuit Court in Montgomery Alabama for a new trial on behalf of her husband, a former Alabama Bureau Investigation agent for the police department of Montgomery, Alabama.

However, later, she eventually divorced her husband—who is imprisoned for the rest of his life. Now the question: What is the status of the wife since the husband did not commit adultery, but murder? Since she divorced her husband, is she free to marry again? Is she bound to this man for the rest of her life? Are there any principles set forth in the Scriptures whereupon we can make a rational decision concerning her predicament? Can she remarry without sinning?[221] We also wonder what woman in her right mind would want to go back to such a brute, even if he were released from prison.

CASE TWO. On April 20, 1988, the Montgomery Advertiser published excerpts from a letter by an "abused wife." This woman testified that she "was beaten, stomped, kicked, burned with cigarettes and stabbed." She also stated that her husband "threw me into a wall so hard that my head went through the paneling. The man was also a gun fanatic. His favorite game when he was drinking was his version of Russian

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[218]See Chapter 8, "The Divorce Sayings in the Synoptics and Pauline Accounts," pp. 150-188.

[219] See Deuteronomy 24:1-4.

[220]Since Mr. Gibson was married more than once, I am speaking of his wife at the time the murder was committed.

[221]As of today (7-19-2008), Grady Gibson is still serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole. On the other hand, Eddie Hart was paroled (8-2-2004) after serving seventeen years of his fifty-year sentence. He was charged with manslaughter.

roulette. His gun, my head." Now the question is: Does God prohibit this woman to divorce her husband who is brutal, inhuman, ruthless, savage, uncaring, heartless, cold-blooded, and violent? Does God outlaw her divorce since sexual immorality was not involved? Can she divorce him and remarry without sinning if fornication was not involved? Would we say, "She is bound for life, adultery not committed"? Are there no mitigating circumstances where mercy takes precedence over law? Would Matthew 12 apply in this case? Is this a ***now*** situation?

David and the Bread of the Presence

Frequently, Christians are treated with the same legality that the religious leaders bound upon the people in the days of Christ (Matthew 5:21-48). Those leaders used their Scriptures in an illegal manner to uphold their traditions (Matthew 15:1-13), as do many Christians today. This same unconcern for the wellbeing of the person is still practiced by many leaders today, especially elders and preachers, to bring persons into conformity with their demands or face the consequences of excommunication from the so-called faithful brethren. Fred Craddock, Bandy Distinguished Professor of Preaching and New Testament, Emeritus, at Chandler School of Theology at Emory University, correctly states the problem:

> This problem is as old as the church, for there has always been a tradition preserved in sacred texts with all the uses and misuses that accompany Scripture. Jesus frequently faced the problem of being charged with flying in the face of Scripture.[222]

As mentioned above, Matthew records a confrontation of the Pharisees with Jesus (Matthew 12:1-12), in which Jesus reminds the leaders that David and his companions violated God's Law concerning the eating of the "Bread of the Presence," but Jesus indicates, according to the conversation, that they were innocent (without guilt). In this particular case of hunger, Jesus informed the leaders that "mercy" took precedence over "Law." In the course of this encounter, Jesus also explained this principle of "mercy" by reminding them of the Sabbath. Jesus corrected their theology by saying, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). In other words, Jesus is simply saying that under normal circumstances we would adhere to the Sabbath regulations, but there may be extenuating circumstances in which mercy takes precedence over Law (Sabbath keeping).

The relationship between the Old Testament incident of David (1 Samuel 21:1-6) and the <u>apparent</u>, not real, infringement of the Sabbath day by the disciples lies in the fact that on both occasions one did that which was forbidden by God and the other forbidden by the religious leaders. Jesus did not directly address the leaders' accusation against the disciples, but, rather, stood with the Pharisees on their own ground and assumed for the sake of argument that the disciples profaned the Sabbath. Jesus reasoned that since it is always "lawful" to do good and to save life on the Sabbath, then, both David and the disciples were within the "spirit" of the Law (see Isaiah 58:6-7; Luke 6:6-11; 13:10-17; 14:1-6).[223]

The same principle that Jesus set forth in this confrontation with the religious leaders may be applied to other commands of God. To apply the same logic about "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" to Matthew 5:32 is appropriate. To illustrate this point still further, neither man nor woman was made for the marriage law, but the marriage law was made for their benefit. In other words, there may be mitigating circumstances, as discussed above, wherein "mercy" takes seniority over "law." Larry Richards' (b. 1931), Christian educator, statement about the principle of mercy is to the point:

> David's need was seen by God as more important than the law's regulation. And the priest's service to Israel was, of course, more important than the Sabbath prohibition against work. In each case a principle of mercy—of deep concern for human need—took precedence over what was technically a violation of law. David and the priest broke the law but were adjudged innocent. Isn't it possible that those who suffer the tragedy of divorce and who remarry do commit

[222]Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987), 119.
[223]See end of this chapter for Scripture citations in full (117-119).

adultery, as David committed sacrilege, and yet are adjudged innocent? Doesn't the law's provision of divorce and its expectation of remarriage indicate that God can and does deal with divorce and remarriage with a mercy quite unlike the attitude of ancient and modern Pharisees who are preoccupied with legalities. . . . It is here (Mt 19) that Jesus points out that divorce was permitted because human hearts are hard, not because God desires divorce. Divorce was an expression of God's mercy, not an affirmation of his ideal will.[224]

Hezekiah and the Passover

God ordained that the Passover be observed on the 14th day of the first month of Nisan (Numbers 9:3). Yet, there were those who could not meet this requirement because of extenuating conditions beyond their control. Thus God gave an "exemption" to this regulation (9:6-7), and, as a result, God informed the Israelites that the feast could be observed on the following month on the fourteenth (9:8-12). These extenuating circumstances created an "exemption," not an "exception," to the normal procedure. This incident of Hezekiah and the Passover is an excellent illustration of biblical situational ethics. The people-in-the-situation made the difference.

According to the Chronicler (2 Chronicles 30:2-5, 18-27), Hezekiah, king of Israel, decided to celebrate the Passover "contrary to what was written" (30:18). Hezekiah discovered that the Passover "had not been celebrated in large numbers according to what was written" (30:5). Even though he had no direct word from the Lord, nevertheless, Hezekiah ordered the priest to slaughter the Passover lamb on the fourteenth day of the second month (30:15). Even though many "were not ceremonially clean" (30:17), still, he prayed for everyone who set his heart on seeking God:

> Although most of the many people who came from Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun had not purified themselves, yet they ate the Passover, contrary to what was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, "May the LORD, who is good, pardon everyone [19] who sets his heart on seeking God—the LORD, the God of his fathers—even if he is not clean according to the rules of the sanctuary." [20] And the LORD heard Hezekiah and healed the people. (30:18-20)

Is this not another example of biblical situational ethics? Because of mitigating factors, God made an "exemption" to His law.

Two Brothers: Eleazar and Ithamar

Who were these two brothers? They were the sons of Aaron and the brothers of Nadab and Abihu. Eleazar and Ithamar witnessed the death of their two brothers (Leviticus 10). Why were they killed? Moses (1525-1406 BC) informs us that they disobeyed God and were destroyed. On the other hand, these other two brothers also disobeyed God, but they were not destroyed. Why were they spared? Did the heart have anything to do with the two sets of brothers? Did the heart play a part in God's reaction to the four brothers in His dispensing of judgment? Were Nadab and Abihu involved in high-handed rebellion against God's commandment? Were the actions of Eleazar and Ithamar also high-hand rebellion against God's commandment? It appears from the context of Leviticus 10 that their actions had to do with their mental state as a result of their having just witnessed the death of their two brothers.

Moses writes that Eleazar and Ithamar *burnt* the "sin offering" rather than *eat* the "sin offering" as commanded by God. To begin with, Moses was highly incensed at their actions. Moses writing in the third person says,

> When Moses inquired about the goat of the sin offering and found that it had been burned up, he was angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's remaining sons, and asked, [17] "Why didn't you eat the sin offering in the sanctuary area? It is most holy; it was given to you to take away the guilt of the community by making atonement for them before the LORD. [18] Since its blood was not taken into the Holy Place, you should have eaten the goat in the sanctuary area, as I commanded." [19] Aaron replied to Moses, "Today they sacrificed their sin offering and their burnt offering before the

[224]Lawrence O. Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 234-35.

LORD, but such things as this have happened to me. Would the LORD have been pleased if I had eaten the sin offering today?" [20] When Moses heard this, he was satisfied. (Leviticus 10:16-20)

Is this biblical situational ethics? Did God exonerate their course of action because of controlling factors? Did the "situation" make the difference in God's reaction to a violation of His law?

CONCLUSION

Did Jesus teach "graded absolutism" or the principle of "mercy" over "Law"? Did Jesus illustrate this righteousness of "leniency" in His dispute with the religious leaders in Matthew 12? Jesus says that it is always lawful to do good and to save life. Jesus illustrates the principle of "to do good" and "to save life" with the example of David and the "Bread of the Presence" that mercy took priority over Law. In other words, Law gave way to mercy.

Jesus conceded that His disciples broke the *rabbinical rules* about the Sabbath, and, then, He used this episode as a basis to call attention to the principle of mercy. Jesus presented the case of David in order to call attention to the principle of kindness, even with a known violation of the Law. Even though David and his men disregarded the Law of God, nevertheless, they were guiltless. Again, we witness the standard of mercy overriding Law. Jesus develops this concept of compassion by saying, "If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:7-8). Even if the disciples had broken the Sabbath, the necessities for life (food) would have overridden Law.

Is there not a grave responsibility upon us to look at variations dictated by concrete situations in our lives before rendering a decision of condemnation? It is before the judgment of God that we are responsible for our good treatment or ill treatment toward God's people. When we fail in honoring an individual's precarious situation in life, there is no lasting worth to what they are doing. The vocation of every Christian should be renewed commitment to the triune God. Yes, there should be a renewed commitment to the words of Scriptures handed down by the Holy Spirit to assist us in loving and serving Him, the Creator of heaven and earth. May God help us to practice the words of Paul to the Christians in Rome. How do we respond to the following comments by Paul?

> Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. (Romans 14:4)

> Why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. (Romans 14:10)

> We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. [2] Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. [3] For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me"[c] [4] For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. [5] May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, [6] so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. [7] Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. (Romans 15:1-7)

The principle of "mercy" over "Law" and the idea of the "weightier" matters of the Law are still valid perceptions that need examination in dealing with conflicts in the lives of men and women. We must deal with the ***then*** and the ***now***.

[c] Psalm 69:9

FULL CITATION OF SCRIPTURES ALLUDED TO EARLIER

Isaiah 58: 6-7

Is not this the kind of fasting I
have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice
and untie the cords of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free
and break every yoke?
7 Is it not to share your food with
the hungry
and to provide the poor
wanderer with shelter—
when you see the naked, to clothe
him,
and not to turn away from your own
flesh and blood?

Luke 6:6-11

On another Sabbath he went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was shriveled. 7 The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath. 8 But Jesus knew what they were thinking and said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Get up and stand in front of everyone." So he got up and stood there. 9 Then Jesus said to them, "I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?" 10 He looked around at them all, and then said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He did so, and his hand was completely restored. 11 But they were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.

Luke 13:10-17

On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, 11 and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. 12 When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." 13 Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God. 14 Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue ruler said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath." 15 The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water? 16 Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?" 17 When he said this, all his opponents were humiliated, but the people were

Luke 14:1-6

One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. 2 There in front of him was a man suffering from dropsy. 3 Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" 4 But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him away. 5 Then he asked them, "If one of you has a son or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull him out?" 6 And they had nothing to say.

delighted with all the wonderful things
he was doing.

This chapter (5) has focused upon the study of divorce within the community of God's people through an analysis of "graded absolutism." Many examples were set forth in order for one to follow the logic of my arguments for divorce for reasons other than just sexual unfaithfulness. We sought to reexamine many Scriptures through new eyes. Many Christians are divided over the subject of divorce. I have sought to apply a greater understanding of Scripture and toleration for those caught up in divorce. Many Christians refuse fellowship with the divorced unless it is for sexual immorality. Many believers are divided into two camps: the exception and the no-exception. The next chapter (6) explores the subject of *unity in diversity* versus *unity in conformity*. Our failure to explore the biblical mandate in this area has resulted in many Christians receiving the label "false teacher." Paul calls for toleration and a spirit of unity in spite of differences within the Christian community. Once more, the following chapter ("Unity in Diversity") calls upon all believers to reexamine old texts through new eyes.

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Unity in Diversity

> One wants to have a God with whom one can negotiate, a religion that consists of accomplishment and return, but not a God who breaks into our life as the living Lord and seizes upon something. Such a claim disturbs the balance of power; one must remove him. It can and dare not be that one is present who calls himself the Son of God.[225]

As we seek to grasp the significance of the phrase "false prophets" in the New Testament writings, we need to rethink the traditional concept of unity within the Christian community. This chapter calls upon the reader to review old texts through new eyes in order to grasp and to maintain the unity for which our Lord Jesus prayed. The clarion call today among many sincere believers is *unity in conformity*, not *unity in diversity*. Diversity from the status quo frequently calls forth the epithet "false teacher." This chapter seeks to set the stage for the further investigation into the misuse of the phrase (false prophets/teachers) against other believers who also believe in Christ's deity and His Incarnation. This study on **unity in diversity** is based on two chapters from the Book of Romans and one chapter from the Book of First Corinthians, which study develops a correct understanding of the subject of false prophets within the Christian community. An awareness of Romans 14 and 15 and 1 Corinthians 8 should assist us in identifying more accurately the use of the phrase that is so loosely employed by many honest and genuine Christians that is not biblical.

It is significant that in Romans 14 and 15 that Paul does not indict believers as dishonorable interpreters or as false teachers for their lack of clear perception concerning the eating of meats and the keeping of certain holy days to the Lord. Even in the Corinthian correspondence, Paul does not castigate the Corinthians for their not fully grasping the utter futility of idols (1 Corinthians 8). The believers in Corinth were one because they believed in Jesus. They believed the Gospel facts—Jesus' Death, Burial, and Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:1-8).

Their salvation was not contingent upon the acuteness of the human intellect or the logical powers of the mind to sort out all the problems encountered in their acceptance of Jesus as the Way of salvation. It was belief of and response to historical facts about Jesus that resulted in salvation by grace through faith, not adherence to opinions reliant upon the sharpness of one's human brainpower. Christianity is founded upon three leading facts: (1) Jesus Christ was crucified upon Mount Calvary, (2) His body was deposited in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, and (3) He did actually rise from the dead on the third day. Christianity does not consist in matters of opinions, but upon facts.

FIRST CORINTHIANS 8

If we profess Christianity, but, at the same time, do not understand that there is only one God the Father and one Lord Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 8:4-6) as many of the Corinthians did not fully comprehend, we wonder how the Christian community today would have reacted to one's lack of comprehension about the deity in the first century. Would the church today have accepted such individuals into the fellowship of the local congregation? Would today's fellowship of Christians have accused those individuals of being false teachers or false prophets? How did Paul react to this lack of comprehension about God? Just a casual reading of First

[225]Emil Brunner (1889-1966), *I Believe in the Living God: Sermons on the Apostles' Creed*, translated and edited by John Holden (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961), 66.

Corinthians 8 reveals that many did not fully grasp the belief that there is just one God the Father and one Lord Jesus Christ.

Did Paul point the finger at them and lay the epithet of "false prophets" on them for their deficiency of discernment? How do we stack this unpleasant mix-up about doctrine in Corinth with the many questions that carve up God's people into so many warring factions today? Some of the Corinthians understood correctly, but, on the other hand, some believers still did not recognize accurately the identity of God. How did Paul deal with such absence in knowledge? He begins this chapter by admitting: "we all possess knowledge" (8:1b). Is correct understanding the most important issue in the life of the believer?

What happens when our knowledge exceeds that of another? What is the most worthy characteristic that exemplifies our favor with God? Is it knowledge or is it love? Paul goes right to the heart of what Christian fellowship is all about: "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up" (8:1c). Do we say, "I know that I am right?" Is our fellowship with other believers based upon a relationship with Jesus through faith or is our fellowship based upon perfection in knowledge? Listen to Paul once more as he seeks to set the record straight: "The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know" (8:2). Regarding this same concept, Carl Ketcherside (1908-1989), author and editor of Mission Messenger, writes with justification:

> Those who were in Christ in the days of the apostles were in error on many points. They were mistaken about a lot of things but they were not charged with "preaching another gospel." Freedom from error is not a condition of salvation else all men would be damned. We are not saved by attainment to a certain degree of knowledge but by faith in Christ Jesus. It is by belief of facts related to him, and not by grasp of abstract truth, that we are justified before God. Certainly it is not by performance of meritorious deeds nor by legalistic conformity. When we postulate a program of justification by knowledge we hang ourselves on the gallows we have constructed to rid ourselves of others, unless we are prepared to make ourselves even more ridiculous by affirming that we know as much as God.[226]

Do we know everything we ought to know? What is God concerned about? Again, Paul, through the Holy Spirit, plunges headlong into the very heart of what matters with God: "But the man who loves God is known by God" (8:3). If we love God, God loves us in spite of our lack of perfection in knowledge. Paul now argues that it is true that there is only one God the Father and one Lord Jesus Christ, but, at the same time, he stresses that not everyone knows this (8:7). How did Paul behave in response to those who were correct in their thinking? He says: "Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak" (8:9). Are we following the example of Paul in this matter? Paul, as he seeks to summarize the attitude of toleration, cuts away all underbrush about one's own path:

> So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. [32] Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—[33] even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. [1] Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ. (10:31-33; 11:1)

Paul exercised the spirit of open-mindedness for shortage of knowledge within the fellowship of God's new community. He followed the example of Christ. Do we follow the pattern of Christ? What did Christ do? Paul describes Christ's spirit of liberality and generosity in the Roman Epistle. One can hardly read this statement of Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:31-33 without reflection upon his conclusion to Chapter Fourteen in the Book of Romans:

> We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. [2] Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. [3] For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."[c] [4] For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. [5] May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, [6] so that with one heart and mouth

[226] Carl Ketcherside (1908-1989), "Another Gospel," *Mission Messenger* 27, no 1 (January 1965): 6-7.

c Psalm 69:9

you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. [7]Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. (Romans 15:1-7)

ROMANS 14 AND 15

False teachers are not by definition those whose knowledge is inadequate. To require that we have perfect knowledge of every detail of God's Word in order to be a trustworthy teacher is to insist on inerrancy and infallibility, an impossible task, even for the most highly trained in the field of biblical interpretation. To expect such an accomplishment is to demand that one be God. Romans 14 is a chapter on how to maintain unity in diversity. There will always be differences within the Christian community. Therefore, we ought not to denounce one another as dishonest guides when we do not dot every "i" or cross every "t" in the same way.

We can no more all think alike than we can all look alike. God has never made absolute perfection in knowledge a condition of salvation; otherwise, none of us could be saved. On the other hand, we can also say that absolute freedom from error is not a condition of salvation either; otherwise, none of us could be saved. We are one in Christ because God has reconciled us unto Himself in and through Jesus, not through intellectual attainment. Toleration for differences of opinions is the subject of Romans 14 and 15, not absolute conformity in belief with other believers, whether right or wrong.

Within the natural realm as well as the spiritual realm, we recognize that there are infants, children, young men, and fathers in both domains, and, as a result of these separations, misinterpretations exist in our endeavor to understand God's Word more perfectly. This diversity resides in both worlds—secular and spiritual—because of the discrepancy of age, the degree of education, cultural background (physical and spiritual), and many other factors. And, as a result of this individuality in perception, distinctions in sharpness are unavoidable.

Is misapprehension of God's Word defiance against God? No! Misunderstanding of God's Word is not rebellion. An honest mistake of the heart is not mutiny. There is distinctiveness between a guileless infraction of the heart and an uprising against God. It is not right for us to castigate (haul over the coals) someone just because we think that our knowledge is more accurate or more developed than someone else's knowledge. We should never exclude another human being from fellowship because of a condition of mental deficiency, or feeble-mindedness, that is to say, one who does not assent to our opinions.

We are not divided over the essentials—Gospel facts—but rather we are on bad terms over issues we have inherited from our traditions. We should practice *unity in diversity* as advanced by Paul in his admonition to the believers in Rome and Corinth. In Romans, Chapter 14, Paul develops the concept of *unity in diversity* and forcefully concludes with the following counsel as stated earlier in this chapter (repetition is unavoidable and is repeated for emphasis):

> We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. [2] Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. [3]For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."[c] [4] For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. [5] May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, [6] so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. [7]Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. (Romans 15:1-7)

Who are the strong? Who are the weak? Were the weak false teachers? Were the strong true teachers? Does inaccuracy in doctrine automatically make us corruptible teachers? Does it not all depend on what the teaching is? Were some wrong in their sensitivity about the keeping of certain days holy to the Lord or the legality of eating certain meats? Were some correct in their views while others were mistaken in their views? What does fellowship mean? What does endorsement mean?

Can we be in fellowship with another person and not necessarily subscribe to the totality of what the

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c Psalm 69:9

other person believes? Are we in fellowship with persons or things? Which? Should we equate fellowship and endorsement as one and the same? For example, do we consider ourselves in fellowship with God? If so, do we maintain that God endorsees everything we believe or do? Who would be so foolish as to make such a claim? If we can be in fellowship with God without God endorsing everything we believe or do, can we not be in fellowship with other believers without endorsing everything the other believes?

What does it mean to exercise "a spirit of unity"? What does it mean to glorify God "with one heart and mouth"? What does it mean to "accept one another . . . just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God"? How does God accept us? Does He not approve of us with warts and all? Should not we take in other believers with warts and all? Has God received us with imperfection in our knowledge and famine in our daily living? Are we to receive others with shortage in their knowledge and fallibility in their daily living? These are questions that we must address. The Holy Spirit nails the coffin shut about these issues: "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (Romans 15:7).

Again, from the Scriptures, we determine that a false prophet/teacher is not automatically someone who has deficiency in understanding. The question that still confronts us though is: How do we settle from Scripture who is or who is not a spurious prophet/teacher? What meaning should we attach to the various Scriptures that speak of false prophets? The first step in explaining Scripture is to read the text. To fathom a passage involves the immediate context, the remote context, and the larger context. The *immediate context* includes verses preceding and following the reference that one is studying. On the other hand, the *remote context* may take in the entire book in which the text is found. Also, the *larger contex*t may embrace the whole of God's written Revelation. This understanding of contexts helps to determine the meaning or meanings that we attach to any distinct phrase. Otherwise, we may impose conjectured convictions on a text without due reflection upon what the author says. Without a conception of context, a person's particular context tends to shape his or her understanding and interpretation of the message.

WHO IS A FALSE PROPHET?

The first part of this chapter analyzed First Corinthians 8 and Romans 14 in order to determine how Paul dealt with differences within the various congregations. These conflicts did not discuss the philosophy of those who sought to undermine the very foundation of Christianity, namely, Jesus as the Messiah, such as I John 4:1-3. When we deny that Jesus is the Christ, we are denying the very foundation on which Christianity stands (2 John 7-11). John goes right to the jugular vein in dealing with false teachers. In fact, he pinpoints, without equivocation, the error of false teachers:

> I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. [22] Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and the Son. [23] No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also. (1 John 2:21-23)

John calls attention to the errors of the false teachers, but, on the other hand, as stated above, it is significant that Paul did not accuse those individuals who were wrong in Corinth (1 Corinthians 8) and Rome (Romans 14 and 15) as being false teachers, for he called them brothers. As we return once more to John, we soon discover that John continues to develop the identification of false teachers in his Second Epistle. In his Second Epistle he deals with Gnostic teaching that denied that Jesus came in the flesh; he does not discuss unity in diversity over peripherals (non-essentials) as Paul did in Romans and First Corinthians. Consider John's warning:

> Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist. [8]Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. [9] Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. [10]If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. (2 John 7-11)

CONCLUSION

Who is the false teacher? Who is the deceiver? Who is the antichrist? John says that the deceivers, that is to say, the antichrists, are those "who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh" (2 John 7). It is at this point that John issues a strong admonition to not receive anyone who "comes to you and does not bring this teaching" (v.10), that is, the teaching "about Christ."[227] Just as John did not contemplate the issues that Paul discussed in First Corinthians 8 and Romans 14 and 15, neither did Jude, our Lord's brother, write about these issues in his discourse on false teachers. Paul, in dealing with *unity in diversity*, did not approach the works of the flesh addressed in the Book of Jude concerning false teachers. On the other hand, neither did Jude deal with *unity in diversity*, but rather, with a denial of God's Word in the lives of men and women and a denial of Jesus as Lord. Think about the words of Jude:

> For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, *who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality* and *deny Jesus Christ* our only Sovereign and Lord. (Jude 4)

Paul also warned again *false teachers*, even as John, Jude, and Peter. But, we should not apply the phrase *false teacher* to one who is contending for the faith (Jesus' Death, Burial, and Resurrection) once delivered to the saints, as recorded by Jude (Jude 3). Paul did not so employ the term (false teacher/prophet) in his discussion of diversity within the Corinthian and Roman congregations. The difficulties in Corinth and Rome, in and of themselves, did not deny the Messiahship of Jesus, did not reject that Jesus had come in the flesh, and did not disagree with the principles of morality upon God's people. One who denies that Jesus is the Christ, one who denies the Incarnation of Christ, and one who turns the grace of God into a license for sexual immorality—this one is a false teacher. Are we following the example of Christ and Paul in our relationship with other believers who do not know as much as we know?

Again, the question that confronts us is: False Prophets: Who Are They? How do we respond to this question? Do we still answer this question based upon whether or not one agrees or disagrees with our brand of orthodoxy? The following lengthy quote from Alexander Campbell's (1788-1866) writings should help us to see the fallacy of making salvation contingent upon absolute perfection in knowledge a condition of salvation:

> Amongst Christians there is now, as there was at the beginning, a very great diversity in the knowledge of the Christian institution. There are babes, children, young men, and fathers in Christ now, as well as in the days of the Apostle John. This, from the natural gifts of God, from the diversities of age, education, and circumstances, is unavoidable. And would it not be just as rational and as scriptural to excommunicate one another, because our knowledge is less or greater than any fixed measure, as for differences of opinion or matters of speculation?
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> Indeed, in most cases where proscription[228] and exclusions now occur in this country, the excluded are the most intelligent members of the society; and although no community will accuse a man because he knows more of his Bible than his brethren, and on this account exclude him from their communion; yet this, it is manifest, rather than heresy, (of which, however, for consistency's sake, he must be accused,) is, in truth, the real cause of separation.
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> If God has bestowed better gifts or better opportunities on one man than another, by which he has attained more knowledge, instead of thanking God for his kindness to the community, they beg God to take him away; and if he will not be so unkind, they will at length put him from among them under the charge of heresy. In most instances the greatest error of which a brother can be guilty, is to study his Bible more than his companions—or, at least, to surpass them in his knowledge of the mystery of Christ.[229]

The present chapter (6) seeks to escape the orthodoxy of a frozen waterfall. Liberation from legalism enables us to rediscover the original understanding of God's Word. The next chapter (7) focuses on an analysis

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[227]For a detailed study of 2 John 9, see "Doctrine of Christ," Chapter 11 in this book, 215-233.

[228]Proscription: An imposed restraint or restriction—PROHIBITION

[229]Alexander Campbell (1788-1866), "To Mr. William Jones, of London, Letter IV," *Millennial Harbinger* 6, no. 3 (March 1835): 112.

of Matthew 7:15, one of the pivotal Scriptures that many Christians rely upon to justify separation from other believers. One objective in Chapter 7 is to look at this old text (Matthew 7:15) through new eyes. Unfortunately, many sincere believers cite this verse through the lenses of their traditions, not the context itself. As in the first century, tradition for many Christians is still the foundation stone for their religious heritage or culture. With the religious leaders in Jesus' day, tradition played an important role within the Jewish community.

When Jesus arrived on the scene, He immediately confronted the traditions of the elders. His Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) is a classic example of this confrontation. It is still difficult for us to resist the temptation to imprison God's written Revelation in a system of human traditions. Unfortunately, many sincere Christians still fail to distinguish between God's Word and their customs. Trained ministers or theologians frequently become the pattern around which the fellowship of God builds its foundation.

7

Watch Out for False Prophets

Jesus concludes His Sermon on the Mount with His warning concerning "false prophets" (Matthew 7:15). This Scripture is frequently cited among many devout and sincere Christians when they disenfranchise other believers from their particular brand of Christianity. Yet, Christians cannot bypass this Scripture. We must come to grips with the meaning of Jesus' words. To whom did Jesus refer to when He warned His listeners about "false prophets"? Is one a "false prophet" when he or she does not subscribe to the particular views of a hard-to-please band of believers? Who were the "false prophets" in Jesus' Sermon? Just a perusal of the Sermon on the Mount along with Jesus' final words against the religious leaders (Matthew 23) should settle the question. It is illegitimate to apply this saying by Jesus to men and women who profess faith in Christ as the Messiah as well as confess that Jesus has come in the flesh. Men and women[230] who lead away from God should be avoided.

Who are those who lead away from God? Are the men and women who lead away from God simply individuals who go outside the traditions of a particular variety of orthodoxy? Is it proper to cite Jesus' words in Matthew 7:15 to anyone who dares to go outside the traditions of one's denominational beliefs? It is not uncommon for us to apply Jesus' epitaph to anyone who fails to measure up to our own religious cultural background. It is significant that the phrase *false prophet* only appears seven times in the New Testament, not always with the same connotation. A careful reading of the Scriptures that contain this phrase is quite revealing. Robert Stein, senior professor of New Testament interpretation at Southern Seminary,[231] is on target when he calls attention to the necessity of applying the correct mental perception of an isolated Scripture:

> The understanding of a text involves the correct mental perception of a text's meaning. Another way of saying this is that understanding involves a correct grasp of the pattern of meaning willed by the author. Since there is a single meaning that the author willed, each individual who understands this meaning will have the same mental grasp of the author's pattern of meaning. Some understandings may be more complete than others because of a greater perception of the

[230]A classic example of women who lead away from God is found in Jesus' letter to the church in Thyatira: "By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols" (Revelation 2:20). This woman is not condemned for teaching, but rather she is damned for what she is teaching. Another example is found in 1 and 2 Timothy concerning women who were involved with "godless myths and old wives' tales" (1 Timothy 4:7), that is to say, stories about the heathen gods and goddesses. These women were also engaged in practicing magic, which, unfortunately, is translated as "busybodies" rather than "magic" in 1 Timothy 5:13. The word *busybodies* (**περίεργοι**, *periergoi*, "magic") is a translation of the same Greek word that is translated as "practiced sorcery" (**περίεργα πραξάντων** *perierga praxantōn* , "doing curious things") in Acts 19:19. In Acts 19, Luke reports details concerning Paul's work in Ephesus, which is where Timothy was when Paul wrote to Timothy. These women were "always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7). They did not understand the Gospel of God.

[231]See "Robert Stein" [ONLINE]. Available from http://www.sbts.edu/Academics/Faculty/Theology/Robert_Stein.aspx (accessed 8 December 2008), for information:

> After giving twenty-eight years of his teaching life to Bethel Theological Seminary, Dr. Robert Stein joined the faculty of Southern Seminary in the fall of 1997. A world-renowned scholar of the synoptic Gospels, Dr. Stein has published numerous books, papers and journal articles addressing the gospels and hermeneutical issues. Among his more recent books are *Luke* in Broadman & Holman's New American Commentary, *Playing by the Rules, The Method and Message of Jesus' Teachings* and *Jesus the Messiah*.

various implications involved, but, if an understanding is correct, it must have the same mental grasp of the author's meaning as any other understanding.[232]

We quickly discover that the phrase is employed in the context of those who lead men and women away from God through the denial that Jesus is the Messiah, or through ethical conduct that does not glorify God. Even when writers of the New Testament do not employ this expression (false prophets) to warn believers about the teachings and practices of certain men and women, we are not left in the dark as to the concerns of the writers in calling attention to behavior and beliefs that will damn our souls (see Revelation 2:18-29). Once more, we need to see old texts through new eyes. This chapter seeks to understand this utterance as employed by Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount in order to preserve the unity for which Jesus prayed.

As we read this examination of Matthew 7:15, hopefully, we will not allow our own prior frame of reference to be the determining factor in seeking to understand this most abused text. We frequently, though unconsciously, employ the Bible to prove a biased perspective against anyone who does not toe-the-line in harmony with our particular fellowship. The interpreter lives in his or her own subjective world. If we wish to unpack Matthew 7:15, we must be committed to the context. Many groups within the Stone/Campbell Movement utilize this Scripture to justify separation from other believers over points that God has never addressed; especially, one's attitude toward a so-called worship service with it five ritualistic acts. Duncan Ferguson (b. 1937), Vice President for Academic Affairs and Professor of Religious Studies at Alaska Pacific University, is correct when he writes: "Whenever anyone attempts to 'hear' what the text has to say, that person inevitably hears and identifies the sounds from within a prior structure of experiences or preunderstanding."[233]

EXPOSITION OF THE PHRASE *FALSE PROPHETS* IN THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Just a perusal of Matthew's Gospel reveals that this phrase is only employed three times, each time by Jesus (7:15; 24:11, 24). It is significant that in all three occurrences, the phrase is applied to those who seek to lead people away from God. In Matthew 7:15, the emphasis on false prophets is associated with the Pharisees and the Scribes (teachers of the Law). After the baptism of Jesus, we find Jesus in Galilee. It is in this geographical location that we discover Jesus preaching His now famous Sermon known as the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus warns His disciples about a righteousness that is external, a righteousness that does not proceed from the heart. Toward the end of His Sermon, Jesus speaks of the religious leaders with a stinging rebuke:

> Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. [16] By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? (Matthew 7:15-16)

What precipitated this warning and condemnation of the religious leaders? As we read carefully the Sermon on the Mount, we quickly discover that Jesus is dealing with the ethical behavior of the leaders in Israel. In this Sermon, Jesus begins by expounding upon the characteristics that must be visible in the life of His followers. In setting forth kingdom behavior, Jesus gives a contrast between the conduct of the religious leaders of His day and the performance God expects of His people. In this antithesis, we are immediately introduced to the distinctiveness of "false teachers" versus the uniqueness of "true teachers."

Jesus initiates His Sermon on the Mount with patterns of behavior that true prophets/teachers will practice and encourage others to carry out in their lives. In this renowned Sermon, Jesus commences with actions that exemplify behavior that pleases God: (1) "Blessed are the poor in spirit" [Matthew 5:3]; "Blessed are those who mourn" [5:4]; "Blessed are the meek" [5:5]; "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness" [5:6]; "Blessed are the merciful" [5:7]; "Blessed are the pure in heart" [5:8]; "Blessed are the peacemakers" [5:9]. In these beatitudes, Jesus stresses that we must be bankrupt in spirit, humble in attitude,

[232]Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 49.

[233]Duncan S. Ferguson, *Biblical Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1986), 6. In 1993, Ferguson is listed as Director, Committee on Higher Education, Presbyterian (U.S.A) Louisville, Kentucky.

gentle in lifestyle, hungering and thirsting after holiness, exhibiting mercy, developing purity, and seeking to promote peace, not discord.

The true teacher longs for the virtues that belong to God. After enumerating the beatitudes, Jesus continues to explain to His disciples how men and women are to put into practice right conduct that gives pleasure to God. He demonstrates this by giving detailed instructions concerning murder (5:21-26), adultery (5:27-30), divorce (5:31-32), oaths (5:33-37), retaliation (5:38-42), behavior toward enemies (5:43-48), correct motive in giving (6:1-4), proper attitude in prayer (6:5-15), legitimate aim in fasting (6:16-18), setting proper priorities (6:19-24), disposition of trust in God (6:25-34), and an admonition to put an end to censorious judging (7:1-6).

Sandwiched between the beatitudes (5:1-16) and the erroneous teachings of the "Pharisees and the teachers of the law" (5:21-7:1-6), Jesus gives a synopsis of the relevancy of the Law (5:17-20).[234] To set the tone for a proper interpretation of the phrase false prophets in Matthew 7:15, the first employment of this phrase in Matthew's Gospel, it is necessary to eliminate difficulties that stand in the way of listening anew to the biblical text. We need to cut our teeth on the concrete meaning of "false prophets" in the light of its context, not church tradition.

What did Jesus say about the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law? Were these men the "false prophets" in Matthew 7:15? Is not Matthew 7:15 the climax of the Sermon on the Mount, along with the two illustrations of the wise and foolish builders? Is Jesus not warning against the behavioral habits of the religious leaders of His day? Did He not say, "By their fruit you will recognize them" (7:16)? Were the religious leaders concerned about justice and mercy, the poor, and the widows? Or were they more concerned about rituals than they were with reference to things that mattered to God? Jesus called upon the disciples to reevaluate and reinterpret what had been handed down to them through the "tradition of the elders." The religious leaders of that day, equivalent to preachers and teachers of our day, were so used to reading the Scriptures as they had been taught by generations of interpreters that they identified their interpretation with the Word of God itself.[235]

An excellent illustration of identification of our interpretation with the Word of God is from Jesus' skirmish with the "Pharisees and teachers of the law" (15:1) over "the tradition of the elders" (Matthew 15:1-20). These "Pharisees and teachers of the law" questioned Jesus about His disciples' behavior concerning the "tradition of the elders" (15:2), and, in response to their question, Jesus rebuked them for their substitution of tradition for the "command of God" (15:3). This observation should prepare us to understand more clearly Jesus' attention to the Law in His Sermon. The "traditions of the elders" made it almost impossible to read the Bible without spectacles. Thus, Jesus, in His Sermon, went right to the heart of the matter in calling attention to the "false prophets":

> Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. [18] I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. [19] Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. [20] For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:17-20)

In this pericope (section or individual unit), Jesus draws a contrast between two kinds of people. Apparently, there were those who did not keep the commandments of God and, at the same time, taught others to break them (See also 15:1-20). On the other hand, there were those who practiced and taught the commandments of God. Again, it is the individual who taught others to break God's commandments whom Jesus addressed toward the end of the Sermon on the Mount (7:15). Beginning with Matthew 5:21 and concluding with Matthew 5:48, Jesus contrasted His teachings with the teachings of the religious leaders. He

[234]See Chapter 1 ("Relevance of the Old Testament") of this book for a detailed analysis of the relevancy of the Old Testament (pp. 1-25).

[235]For a detained study of the religious leaders and their traditions in the time of Christ, see Chapter 4 ("Political Power of the Pharisees") in this book (pp. 78-92).

begins by calling attention to what they had heard from the teachers of the Law: "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago" [**τοῖ ἀρχαίοις**, *toi archaios*, "to the ancients"] (5:21); on the other hand, Jesus gives the true interpretation of the Law by saying: "But I tell you" [**δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν**, *de legō hymin*] (5:22).[236]

Since Jesus dealt with the "Pharisees and the teachers of the law" in His Sermon on the Mount, this understanding should facilitate a clearer view of these false teachers by acquainting ourselves with their known behavior. Just what role do the Pharisees and Scribes (teachers of the Law) play in Matthew's narrative about Christ? It is worthy of note that Matthew opens his book with John's confrontation with these religious leaders (Matthew 3) and closes his book with Jesus' strong rebuke of these same Pharisees and teachers of the Law (Matthew 23).[237] This group plays such a major role in Jesus' ministry that Matthew introduces his readers to this group of religious leaders in the inauguration of John's ministry:

> But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? [8] Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. (3:7-8)

John the Baptist called upon the Pharisees and Sadducees to "Produce fruit in keeping with repentance" (3:8). In this same vein, Jesus, after cataloging a list of fruits, said, "By their fruit you will recognize them" (7:15). As mentioned above, Jesus begins His Sermon with a reference to the "Pharisees and teachers of the law" (5:20). On two other occasions (12:38 and 15:1), Matthew combines the Pharisees and teachers of the Law in a confrontation with Jesus. In one of these wars of words, they wanted a sign from heaven to authenticate Jesus as the Messiah. But, once more, Jesus exposed their hypocrisy (12:38-45). These religious leaders played an important role in Matthew's account of Jesus' ministry. For example, Matthew employed the term "Pharisees" twenty-eight times and the phrase "teachers of the law" nineteen times[238]

THE FIRST MAJOR CONTROVERSY

To assist us in our understanding of Matthew 7:15, we need to reread Matthew's Gospel in order to get a bird's-eye view of the whole scenario of Jesus' encounter with the religious leaders. The first major controversy with the religious leaders occurs in Matthew 9. In this chapter, Jesus rebukes the leaders of Israel for their "insincerity." Jesus had just performed a number of miracles (Chapter 8). For instance, [1] He healed a man with leprosy (8:1-4); [2] He healed the centurion's servant (8:5-13); [3] He healed Peter's mother-in-law and cast out demons and healed all the sick (8:14-17); [4] He calmed the storm (8:28-34); [5] He healed two demon-possessed men (8:28-34); and, finally, He healed a paralytic (9:1-2).

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[236]The prevailing interpretation of "You have heard that it was said" (KJV) is generally credited with the teachings of the Old Testament, but this does not appear to be correct in light of the context. In this Sermon, Jesus is drawing attention to the original intent of the Law versus the teachings of the religious leaders. For one to follow these teachers of the Law is tantamount to following a "false prophet."

[237]Matthew also employs a number of literary techniques to call attention to the importance of certain subjects. For example, Matthew introduces us to baptism in John's ministry: (1) baptism of the people [3:1-12] and (2) the baptism of Jesus [3:13-17], and, then, Matthew concludes his Gospel with Jesus' command to baptize (28:16-20). Another characteristic that is quite interesting is Matthew's report of the life of Christ; for example, He starts his book, following the genealogy of Christ, with the teachings of John and the teachings of Jesus (Sermon on the Mount—5:1-7:28), and, then, concludes his book with Jesus emphasis on "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (28:20). Following the baptism of Jesus, Matthew also informs us that Jesus "went throughout Galilee teaching in their synagogues" (4:23) and, then, immediately, gives the substance of that teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. For a detailed study of the Book of Matthew, see Chapter 2 in this book ("A Literary Analysis of the Gospel of Matthew"), pp. 26-62.

[238]Matthew makes reference to the Pharisees twenty-eight times in his Gospel: 3:7; 5:20; 9:11, 14, 34; 12:2, 14, 24, 38; 15:1, 12; 16:1, 6, 11, 12; 19:3; 21:45; 22:15, 34, 41; 23:2, 13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29; 27:62. In the Gospels, there are seventy-nine occurrences of the "Pharisees" in seventy-seven verses. Matthew makes reference to the "teachers" of the law nineteen times: 2:4; 5:20; 7:29; 9:3; 12:38; 15:1; 16:21; 17:10; 20:18; 21:15; 23:2, 13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29; 26:57; 27:41. In the Gospels, there are fifty-five occurrences of the "teachers of the law" in fifty-five Bible verses. In order for one to understand Jesus' caution in Matthew 7:15, it would be helpful for one to read the context of the above-mentioned Bible verses.

As a result of these miracles, the leaders of Israel reacted negatively toward His healing ministry. Immediately following the healing of the paralytic (9:1-2), Jesus reacted strongly toward their inner thoughts. Matthew writes: "At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, 'This fellow is blaspheming!'" (9:3). Notice that this accusation of blasphemy was not verbalized but remained within their own evil minds. But Jesus looked into the inner recesses of their depraved minds and said, "Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts?" (9:4). For the first time in Matthew's Gospel, the religious leaders and Jesus have direct contact. These controversies foreshadowed the final significant debate that Jesus had with the leaders of Israel. Jesus' ministry began with conflict and ended with conflict.

THE LAST MAJOR CONTROVERSY

This last argument took place during the last week of Jesus' ministry. The following is a brief summary of the events that transpired during Jesus' final week:

- The Triumphal Entry (21:1-11)
- The Cleansing of the Temple (21:12-17)
- The Last Controversies with the Jewish Leaders (21:18—23:39)
- The Olivet Discourse concerning the End of the Age (24-25)
- The Anointing of Jesus' Feet (26:11-13)
- The Arrest, Trials, and Death of Jesus (26:14-27:66)
- The Resurrection (28)

During this final week (Passion Week), the hostilities with the religious leaders escalate (Chapters 21-23), and then they put Him to death (Chapters 26-27). These leaders continue to see themselves as the lawful leaders of Israel and, at the same time, the legitimate interpreters of Scripture and the official holders of their religious heritage or traditions. Chapter 21 narrates [1] Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem (21:1-11), [2] Jesus at the temple (21:12-17), and [3] the withering of the fig tree (21:18-22). It was then, according to Matthew, that the chief priest and elders questioned the authority of Jesus: "By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you this authority?" (21:23).

Again, as in His earlier major encounter with the religious leaders, He exposes them for their hypocrisy. To begin with, Jesus questioned them about the origin of John's baptism (21:24-27). In their response, they revealed their true character in the same way that they had manifested when they went out to hear John the Baptist preach in the wilderness (3:7-10). Prior to this last great controversy (Chapters 21-23), Jesus had previously, according to the apostle John, brought to their attention two facts: [1] that their existence did not originate in God, and [2] that their allegiance belonged to Satan (John 8:13, 44).

Matthew, too, records the head-on clash that led to Jesus' allegations (Matthew 21-22). Following the narration of this clash, Matthew gives the reaction of the religious leaders concerning Jesus' parables: "When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them" (21:45). Matthew further informs his readers that "they looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet" (21:46). Earlier, in the beginning of His ministry, the disciples of Jesus had cautioned Jesus about His remarks against the Pharisees.

> Then the disciples came to him and asked, "Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this?"
> He replied, "Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be pulled up by the roots. [14] Leave them; they are
> blind guides.[e] If a blind man leads a blind man, both will fall into a pit." (15:12-14)

This final controversy with the religious leaders was not something new with Jesus.[239] The climax of Jesus' ministry concludes with His final denunciation of these false prophets. Matthew, once more, as he brings

[e] Some manuscripts *guides of the blind*

[239] See also Matthew 15:1-14.

to an end his Gospel, opens this discourse of controversy with Jesus questioning these evil leaders. For example, He interrogates these insincere men about John's baptism, as stated above, and after their refusal to answer His question about John's baptism (21:24-27), He responds with three parables that condemn these dishonest leaders: [1] The Parable of the Two Sons (21:28-32); [2] The Parable of the Tenants (21:33-46); and [3] The Parable of the Wedding Banquet (22:1-11).

THE PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS

> "What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.' [29] 'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went. [30] Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go. [31] Which of the two did what his father wanted?" "The first," they answered. Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. [32] For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him." (21:28-32)

In the Parable of the Two Sons (21:28-32), He rebukes the Jewish leaders for their refusal to change their minds and believe, even though they had seen God at work in Him. As we read Matthew's narrative of the events, we cannot help but wonder if his readers did not reflect upon these same leaders in the prologue to his Gospel when he wrote:

> When he [Herod] had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ[c] was to be born. [5] "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written: [6] 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.'"[d] (2:4-6)

This Parable of the Two Sons is a slap-in-the-face against the false prophets in Matthew 7:15—and they knew it. Following this parable, Jesus presented another parable—The Parable of the Tenants.

THE PARABLE OF THE TENANTS

> "Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and went away on a journey. [34] When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit. [35] The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. [36] Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. [37] Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said. [38] But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' [39] So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. [40] Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants? [41] 'He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,' they replied, 'and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.'" [42] Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone[a]; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes'[b]? [43] Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. [44] He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed."[c] [45] When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them. [46] They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet. (21:33-46)

In this second parable (21:33-46), Jesus demonstrates that the leaders of Israel failed to meet their responsibilities to God (21:34-36). Even when God sent His Son, they rejected Him (21:37-40). With these parables, Jesus places the religious leaders in the history of rejection of God's Anointed One. God is now giving

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[c] Or *Messiah*
[d] Micah 5:2
[a] Or *cornerstone*
[b] Psalm 118:22, 23
[c] Some manuscripts do not have verse 44.

the vineyard to those who will accept Jesus (21:41-44). Matthew makes known to his readers that the leaders knew that these three parables were spoken against them (21:45). Instead of repentance, the leaders looked for a way to arrest Him (21:46). These leaders are the false prophets of Matthew 7:15. Once more, Jesus presented another parable to draw attention to their rejection of the One whom God sent—The Parable of the Wedding Banquet.

THE PARABLE OF THE WEDDING BANQUET

> Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: [2] "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. [3]He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. [4]Then he sent some more servants and said, 'Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.' [5] But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. [6]The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. [7]The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. [8] Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. [9]Go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.' [10]So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. [11]But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. [12]'Friend,' he asked, 'how did you get in here without wedding clothes?' The man was speechless. [13] "Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' [14] For many are invited, but few are chosen." (22:1-14)

In this third parable (22:1-18), Jesus makes the same point about the relationship of the religious leaders and God's kingdom. This parable is a direct rebuke against the leaders. The major themes of this parable are: [1] The king prepares a wedding banquet (22:2); [2] those invited find excuses not to attend and, then kill those sent with invitations (22:3-6); [3] the king responds by destroying their city as punishment[240] and invites outsiders to attend (22:8-10); and [4] the leaders are warned that if they do not dress properly, then they will be thrown out (22:11-14). Jesus nails the coffin shut on these false teachers in Matthew 7:15.

THE CONSPIRACY OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Now, four scenes follow these parables in which various combinations of the religious leaders combine their efforts to defeat and to put an end to this supposed troublemaker (22:15-22). The various sects combined their efforts to work together in order to discredit Jesus in the eyes of the people. Immediately following the Parable of the Wedding Banquet, we observe the Pharisees and the Herodians in a clandestine operation to try to entrap Him. Matthew preserves this undercover operation for the extermination of Jesus.

Pharisees and Herodians

> Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. [16]They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians. "Teacher," they said, "we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are. [17] Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" [18]But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, "You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? [19] Show me the coin used for paying the tax." They brought him a denarius, [20] and he asked them, "Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?" [21] "Caesar's," they replied. Then he said to them, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's." [22] When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left him and went away. (22:15-22)

[240]Jesus develops this destruction more fully in Matthew 24.

The first scene combines the Pharisees and the Herodians. These two groups schemed together to try to silence Him. They tried to lay a trap for Him over the payment of taxes to Caesar (22:15-16). Insincerity controls this pericope. In this showdown, Jesus calls these religious leaders hypocrites (22:18). Why did He call them hypocrites? Matthew informs his readers that Jesus knew "their evil intent" (22:18). In the next scene, we observe the extreme insincerity of the Sadducees in questioning Him about marital relationships after the resurrection.

Sadducees

That same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to him with a question. [24] "Teacher," they said, "Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and have children for him. [25]Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. [26]The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh. [27] Finally, the woman died. [28]Now then, at the resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?" [29]Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. [30]At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. [31]But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, [32] 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'[a]? He is not the God of the dead but of the living." [33]When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching. (22:23-33)

The second scene embraces the Sadducees questioning Him about marriage at the resurrection (22:23-33)—they did not believe in the resurrection (22:23). They were spiritually blind in their understanding of the Scriptures (22:29-31); they were also spiritually blind in that they did not understand the power of God (22:29). Again, we recognize an underhanded manipulation to catch Him in an entanglement that they imagined was hopeless to escape. But they failed just as their cohorts' efforts also misfired in their attempt to try to get Him in hot water with the people or with the authorities. In the next episode, we look at an expert in the Law trying his hand.

Pharisees

Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. [35]One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: [36] "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" [37] Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.'[a] [38]This is the first and greatest commandment. [39] And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'[b] [40]All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (22:34-40)

The third episode involves their efforts to entrap Him over the greatest commandment in the Law (22:34-35). Jesus knew that the Pharisees were devious, sly, dishonest, foxy, crooked, and shrewd; He knew that this question was to test Him. Thus, Jesus in response to their question also asked them a question about who Christ is.

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, [42] "What do you think about the Christ[a]? Whose son is he?" "The son of David," they replied. [43] He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says, [44] 'The Lord said to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet.'[b]45] If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?" [46] No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions. (22:41-46)

[a] Exodus 3:6
[a] Deut. 6:5
[b] Lev. 19:18
[a] Or *Messiah*
[b] Psalm 110:1

The fourth incident embodies the gathering together of the Pharisees. Jesus took advantage of this occasion and asked them to answer the question: "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" (22:42), but they refused to answer (22:41-45). The religious leaders abandon their attempt to show that He posed a theological threat to their traditions through His exposition to the Law. As we reflect upon the question Jesus asked the Pharisees, surely the readers of this Gospel must have recalled this same question to the apostles (16:13-20). During His conflict (21:18-23:39), Jesus goes to the very heart of their problems: "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God" (22:29).

SEVEN WOES AGAINST THE LEADERS OF ISRAEL

Following this final conflict with the religious leaders, Jesus summarizes their many faults and addresses them as "hypocrites" and "blind guides" (Matthew 23). In His brief explanation of the leaders, He warns His disciples to obey them, not to copy them: "So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach" (23:3).

Matthew 23 details one of the most graphic descriptions available in all of Scripture about the decadence of Israel's leaders. Jesus issues seven woes against the religious leaders (23:13-33). Before enunciating the seven woes, He, like a bolt of lightning, goes to the very core of their corrupt nature: "Everything they do is done for men to see" (23:5).[241] The seven woes announced by Jesus are devastating to these leaders. This detailed analysis is given in order that one may ascertain beyond the shadow of a doubt, as to whom Jesus had in mind when He spoke of false prophets in Matthew 7:15). The following is His stinging condemnation of the false prophets issued in seven woes:

1. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. (23:13-14)

2. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are. (23:15)

3. Woe to you, blind guides! You say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.' You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? You also say, 'If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath.' You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it. (23:16-22)

4. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel. (23:23-24)

5. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean. (23:25-26)

6. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. (23:27-28)

7. Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. (23:29; full text is 23:29-39)

[241]In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warned His disciples about external behavior performed for show. In that Sermon, Jesus discloses the same mindset (Matthew 6:1-8) that He addresses in Matthew 23.

In this conversation against the religious leaders, Jesus castigates them as "blind" five times (22:16, 17, 19, 24, 26) and as "hypocrites" six times (23:13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29). They did not understand the important things in God's Revelation. These leaders did not go for inner purity but were content with externals (23:23, 27-28). They were faultless in their observance of their rituals, but they were short on "justice, mercy and faithfulness" (23:23). This inner decay was so rampant among the religious leaders that Jesus issued His scathing attack against their unethical behavior. Jesus confronted these leaders head-on in their full-fledged, legalistic, ritualistic, and hair-splitting teachings (23:15). Consider the following judgments voiced by Jesus in His reaction to the religious leaders' hypocrisy:

- Brood of vipers! (23:33)
- Lawless (23:23, 28)
- Covetous (23:25)
- Self-indulgent (23:25)
- Hypocrites (23:28)
- Abusive (23:34)
- Murderous (23:34-35)

Jesus' castigation of the above leaders' unethical behavior is not the whole story. In fact, they enter into a conspiracy with other leaders in order to bring about the death of Jesus. For instance, Matthew concludes his Gospel with a reference to this conspiracy on the part of the leaders to eliminate Jesus.

> Then the chief priests and the elders of the people assembled in the palace of the high priest, whose name was Caiaphas, [4] and they plotted to arrest Jesus in some sly way and kill him. [5] "But not during the Feast," they said, "or there may be a riot among the people." (26:3-4)

Matthew portrays the stealth employed by the so-called religious leaders to bring about the crucifixion of Jesus. They themselves do not openly arrest Jesus, but rather they employed Judas for this clandestine operation (26:14-16). Next, observe how they hid behind the crowd that they sent to arrest Him (26:47). Then, even in the trial they employed false testimony and false witnesses to gain conviction (26:59-60). Again, they also accused Jesus of blasphemy in order to give credence to their condemnation of Him (26:65-68). Once again, while Jesus was on the Cross, they mocked Him (27:41-43). And finally, they even went so far as to try to frustrate the Resurrection by sealing and guarding the tomb (27:62-66).

CONCLUSION

Throughout the Gospel of Matthew, the religious leaders are presented in a very unfavorable light. They rejected God's point of view about His Son. They acted without authority from God. Jesus acknowledges that they have no God-given mandate to lead the children of Israel; in fact, they are children of Satan (12:24-37). Jesus accuses them of being of the Devil (13:36-43; 15:12-13). These leaders are so corrupt and evil and dishonest that they cannot recognize the power and presence of God's initiative in the history of salvation (21:23). Jesus held them responsible for the future destruction of Jerusalem (22:7). Following His seven woes, Jesus foretells the destruction of their city (chapter 24). As Matthew concludes his life of Christ, surely his readers must have reflected upon Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in which He forewarned His disciples: "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves" (7:15).

My objective in writing this chapter on men and women who lead away from God is not to attack those who apply Matthew 7:15 to other Christians who often disagree with the "party cry," but rather to assist these individuals in handling correctly God's Word. The chief objective of this study is to help preserve the unity for which Jesus prayed in His priestly prayer (John 17). Matthew 7:15 is frequently misapplied by many sincere Christians within the twenty-five or more divisions within the Stone/Campbell Movement. Yet, this epithet, or label, is frequently applied by other denominations to condemn those who do not subscribe to the status quo.

Hopefully, this analysis of Matthew 7:15 will help individuals from every denomination to focus more on the context when they want to understand the intent of the author. There is a need, I believe, to guard against interpretations that may not, in spite of all their sincerity, ring true to the biblical Revelation itself. Often, subjective interpretations and dogmatic approaches by many Christians do much to deny the very Scriptures they claim to uphold.

Leaders (preachers, elders, and editors) should be very careful about superimposing upon a text their own speculative and subjective interpretation in order to avoid the very error that Jesus condemned among the religious leaders. May God help every Christian not to apply this Scripture (Matthew 7:15) to believers who hold to the use of Sunday school, individual communion cups, wine, grape juice, manner of breaking the bread in the Lord's Supper, the treasury, Bible colleges, instrumental music, hand-clapping, solo singing in the assembly, choirs, and so on.

Are we hearing this text afresh? We should not allow our traditions to stand in the way of listening once again to this biblical passage. We are so used to reading this Scripture as we have been taught by generations of godly men and women that for us to question the traditional interpretation is to question Scripture itself. As God's people, we must learn to have another look at the context of Scripture and reinterpret hand-me-down interpretations that have been cherished for centuries. Since we are a product of our own religious culture, it is difficult, if not almost impossible, for us to read the Bible without spectacles. Unconsciously, the interpretation of the church fathers has become the watchword of orthodoxy in the interpretation of this frequently altered Scripture (Matthew 7:15).

It is not exceptional for the biblical message to be limited by some predetermined interpretive grid. One of the greatest ways to be sure that our interpretation of a passage remains faithful to our tradition is to ignore the context. Our approach to Matthew 7:15 through a predetermined "interpretive filter"—an interpretation handed down through generations of interpreters—should be avoided with extreme care. If we approach this Scripture, or any Scripture for that matter, with strong subjective biases, we will view God's Word through colored glasses.

In concluding this study on false prophets in Matthew 7:15, we must again ask ourselves the question: "How did Christ employ this stinging phrase?" **We should guard ourselves against manipulating biblical material to support our prior ecclesiastical interest**. We must struggle to liberate the New Testament from the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries of ecclesiastical assumptions. We must always be on lookout to prevent our religious reasoning and enthusiasm from being substituted for ungrounded interpretations of our brains. We must ever guard against the fallacy of reading our own experience into the world of the text.

The next chapter (8) also explores other texts that are often interpreted with wooden literalness. **One objective of this book is to call attention to the fact that we need to reexamine old texts through new eyes.** The divorce sayings in the Synoptics and Pauline writings are some of the most abused Scriptures within the community of Christ. This chapter opens up many Scriptures in order to apply biblical principles to the ***now*** of our everyday lives. Are there biblical principles that can be gleaned from the sacred writings that will enable us to draw conclusions that will help alleviate the emotional stress that we often find ourselves confronting? Hopefully, the next chapter will help to make less burdensome the weight of guilt that so many Christians carry as a result of a tragic divorce. Again, we need to explore old texts through new eyes.

8

The Divorce Sayings

> Without discussing immediately the correctness or incorrectness of these interpretations, it may be profitable to consider the danger of approaching the Scriptures with preconceived ideas on what a text can or cannot say. Regardless of which interpretation is correct, it is frightening that the meaning of the text no longer serves as a final authority. On the contrary, it is the present theology that predetermines what the text means and that serves as a final authority![242]

The "divorce sayings" in the Synoptic Gospels and the teachings of Paul are interpreted with a diversity of explanations. Each interpreter assumes that his or her clarifications of the divorce sayings are God given. There is no room for disagreement once a pronouncement is made. A perusal of the various religious journals reveals that the most able and accomplished preachers differ widely in their explanations of the "bill of divorcement" statements. We differ widely in our understanding of the subject of divorce and remarriage. We have allowed our discernment about the termination of a marriage to fracture the fellowship of believers. We make no room for differences. We must agree with certain or convinced interpreters or suffer the consequences.

We struggle daily over how we are to interpret the divorce remarks when confronted with mitigating situations surrounding depraved behavior or circumstances, which extenuating circumstances often alter our station in life. For example, have we ever considered the predicament of someone whose spouse has committed murder? How should we react to physical abuse by one's spouse? Does God demand that we stay married to someone who is confined to prison for the rest of his or her life because of some degenerate action committed by the spouse imprisoned? Does God command us to live with someone who is "hell" on earth? If someone is guilty of murder, not sexual immorality, is the other partner committed to the murderer for the rest of his or her life? We do not always know what course of action to pursue when we confront surroundings beyond our control.

Since divorce and remarriage are prevalent in every society, as it was also in Jesus' society, it is incumbent upon us to seek answers from principles set forth in Holy Scripture in trying to ferret out the intricate problems we face daily concerning the dilemma of divorce and remarriage. In pursuit of correct answers about how to react in all surroundings, we soon discover that there are no "pat" answers. This research pursues two avenues of thought to cope with the problem of divorce and remarriage: (1) exaggeration in the divorce sayings, and (2) the principle of mercy over law.

EXAGGERATION

Divorce is not always obtained on the basis of "sexual immorality." Does this lack of adultery always violate the divorce sayings in the Synoptic Gospels and Pauline writings? Are there any valid reasons for divorce other than "fornication"? Did Jesus teach that there are no *exemptions* to the marriage bond other than "fornication" or "adultery"? When Matthew, Mark, and Luke recorded the divorce sayings, did they consider the pronouncements of Jesus a dissertation on the subject of divorce and remarriage? Did Jesus contemplate

[242]Robert H. Stein, *Interpreting Puzzling Texts in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 95.

wife abuse,[243] husband abuse, child abuse, desertion, and withholding of conjugal rights? In Jesus' response to the Pharisees in Matthew 19:1-12, did Jesus have in mind such crimes as murder and armed robbery on the part of one of the partners? Did He contemplate these atrocities in His Sermon on the Mount when He discussed the teachings of the Pharisees and scribes about divorce and remarriage (Matthew 5:31-32)? Are these hypothetical cases or are these circumstances that need review in making a judgment about the innocent party?

Are these acts of violence included in the word "fornication" or did Jesus exclude every crime except "sexual immorality"? Were these words of Jesus simply "overstatement" or "exaggeration" to emphasize the original intent of God? These are questions that require response. When we limit divorce and remarriage to "sexual immorality," we often create impossible situations for individuals who suffer from circumstances beyond their control. For example, consider the following trauma that two women experienced in their marital relationships. One of the husbands was involved in a very heinous murder and the other husband was deeply involved in wife abuse of great degradation.

CASE ONE. The following is a brief scenario of two men who conspired to kill the wife of one of them. According to a police report, Grady Gibson[244] and Eddie Hart combined forces to kill Eddie's wife to collect insurance money ($100,000). Eddie (the murdered woman's husband) and Grady collected the money, but their clandestine operation was not discovered until almost two years after the killing—both men were eventually brought to trial. One of the men, Grady, who almost decapitated Eddie's wife, received life without parole for his part in the homicide. On the other hand, Eddie, the dead woman's husband, received a fifty-year sentence.[245] Now the dilemma!

What is the status of Mrs. Gibson, the wife of Grady? Is Mrs. Gibson bound to her husband for life? Since Grady did not pull Eddie's wife's "panties" off, does Mrs. Gibson have the right to divorce Grady and marry someone else? What did Grady do? He just almost cut the woman's head off. Now, according to some, if he had just had sex with her, then, Mrs. Gibson would have a biblical reason for divorce. But since he just almost cut her head off—"bound for life" is the battle cry of many preachers and elders.[246]

CASE TWO**.** In 1988, the *Montgomery Advertiser* (20th of April) published excerpts from a letter by an "abused wife." She wrote that she "was beaten, stomped, kicked, burned with cigarettes and stabbed." This is

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[243]James O'Reilly, "Wife Beating: The Silent Crime" *Time* 5 (September 1983), 23, writes:

> Nearly 6 million wives will be abused by their husbands in any one year. Some 2,000 to 4,000 women are beaten to death annually. The nation's police spend one third of their time responding to domestic-violence calls. Battery is the single major cause of injury to women, more significant than auto accidents, rapes or muggings.

Again, he captures the mentality of many preachers, elders, or editors of religious journals, when they encourage the battered-wife to stay in such a relationship:

> If the woman does not leave or seek help after the first episode, it can be taken as a sign of acquiescence, which usually leads to more violence. But it is extremely difficult to pack up and go, even if a woman can afford to. Explains Jane Tolliver, a counselor in the Atlanta Y.W.C.A'S battered-women's program: "<u>They've been told by their ministers and their families that a good woman can change a man</u>." These women represent society's traditional values. Says Tolliver: "They are nurturing. They want successful marriages. And it is precisely those things that trap them" (Ibid., 24, the "underlining" is my emphasis--RDB).

[244]As of today (7-19-2008), Grady Gibson is still serving a life sentence without the possibility of parole. On the other hand, Eddie Hart was paroled (8-2-2004) after serving seventeen years of his fifty-year sentence. He was charged with manslaughter.

[245]I am reporting this story as it appeared in the newspaper as well as from relatives of the slain girl. This story illustrates the extravagance that many leaders revert to in their wooden interpretation of the divorce sayings. Some individuals have questioned whether they were guilty or not. I am using this scenario as a classic example of the extremes that numerous leaders take concerning the divorce sayings.

[246]This is no joke. It is true! I have talked with a number of preachers, who say, "Bound for life." Does this kind of reasoning remind one of the reasoning that Jesus encountered with the religious leaders in His day? The Pharisees, teachers of the law, and elders of the people had no concept of "mercy" over "law." This philosophy is still in vogue by many religious leaders today, especially preachers and elders. I thank God that this kind of attitude is not prevalent with all preachers and elders. I know of many who repudiate such illogical thinking.

not all! There is much more to this horror. She further describes her mistreatment: "He threw me into a wall so hard that my head went through the paneling. The man was also a gun fanatic. His favorite game when he was drinking was his version of Russian roulette. His gun, my head."

Now the dilemma! Does God expect a woman to live with a man like that? Is this woman forbidden by God to divorce this brutal, inhuman, ruthless, savage, uncaring, heartless, cold-blooded, violent, sick person, simply because "sexual immorality" was not involved? If she does divorce, can she remarry without sinning? Many would say bound for life! Why? Well, you know that adultery was not committed!

Is there a biblical solution to the apparent problem? Is there the possibility of exaggeration in Jesus' statements concerning divorce? In considering the dilemmas of these two women, we should examine the use of *overstatement* as used by our Lord in His teaching techniques. Not only did Jesus avail Himself of this method, but also the Holy Spirit employs this procedure throughout the Scriptures. By not giving attention to this teaching style, one may misapply and pervert the Bible.

Overstatement and Hyperbole

Exaggeration consists of *hyperbole* as well as *overstatement*. What is the distinction between *hyperbole* and *overstatement*? Robert Stein, Senior Professor of New Testament Interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, says that *hyperbole* contains a bold exaggeration that cannot literally occur, but, on the other hand, *overstatement* is a bold exaggeration that can occur.[247] Is exaggeration or *overstatement* involved in the divorce sayings? A study of *overstatement* or *hyperbole* can assist us in a correct interpretation of many confusing Scriptures—especially Scriptures in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:21-48). One of the divorce sayings (5:31-32) that Matthew records is found in this well-known Sermon. Some of the most startling uses of exaggeration are found in Jesus' Sermon. Through this practice of exaggeration, He captures the attention of His listeners and forcefully brings home His point.

Before analyzing the various pericopes concerning divorce, we need to read for ourselves the divorce sayings in the Synoptics (Matthew, Mark, and Luke).

Matthew 5:31-32

It has been said, 'Anyone who divorces his wife must give her a certificate of divorce.' [32] But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.

Matthew 19:1-9

When Jesus had finished saying these things, he left Galilee and went into the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. [2]Large crowds followed him, and he healed them there. [3] Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" [4]"Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' [5]and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? [6] So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." [7] "Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her

[247]Robert H. Stein, *Difficult Sayings in the Gospels: Jesus' Use of Overstatement and Hyperbole* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 48-49.

away?" [8]Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. [9] I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery."

Mark 10:1-12

Jesus then left that place and went into the region of Judea and across the Jordan. Again crowds of people came to him, and as was his custom, he taught them. [2]Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" [3]"What did Moses command you?" he replied. [4] They said, "Moses permitted a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away." [5] "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied. [6]"But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.' [7] 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, [8]and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one. [9]Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." [10]When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. [11]He answered, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. [12]And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery."

Luke 16:18

Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Having just read these Scriptures from Matthew, Mark, and Luke, how do we know that Jesus employed *exaggeration* or *overstatement* in His handling of the question of divorce? First, consider the two different narratives as reported by Mark and Luke.

Mark 10:11

He answered, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her."

Luke 16:18

Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

Is there anything in these verses that jumps out at you? What is it that Jesus leaves out that He included in the Matthean accounts? Did Jesus include the "exemption" clause in Mark and Luke? No! It is not there. Neither writer chronicles the "exemption" clause. On the other hand, Matthew attaches the "exemption" clause. Why? Does this inclusion in Matthew suggest that he understood the words reported by Mark and Luke to be ***overstatement***? On the one hand, it appears that the words in Mark and Luke are absolute, no exemptions. But,

on the other hand, Matthew, with divine authority, interprets Jesus' words as forbidding divorce, but NOT in an absolute sense as reported by Mark and Luke.[248] For example, Matthew records, "But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery." Why are there differences in the various accounts?

Are there any other exceptions other than what Matthew mentioned? What about Paul's letter to Corinth in which he dealt with the subject of desertion on the part of the unbeliever (1 Corinthians 7:15). How did Paul deal with the issue of defection? Did Paul not know about Jesus' teachings as recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke? Did Paul understand Jesus' teaching about divorce as overstatement in order to stress the original intent of marriage? Just a cursory reading of Paul's first letter to Corinth reveals that he did not interpret the divorce sayings in the Synoptics as an absolute statement with no ramifications. When the unbeliever abandons the believer, Paul writes: "But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace" (1 Corinthians 7:15). '"Not bound' . . . almost certainly means free to marry," writes Stein.[249]

Does Paul contradict Jesus' teachings as reported by the synoptic writers? Did not Paul also write under the guidance of the Holy Spirit? Matthew inserts "fornication." Paul injects "desertion," but Mark and Luke do not mention any valid reasons for divorce. Do Mark and Luke contradict Matthew and Paul? How do we harmonize the differences in the various accounts of the divorce sayings? Perhaps the answer lies in the literary technique of exaggeration. We can safely conclude that Jesus employed *overstatement* and *hyperbole* in the Sermon on the Mount in order to highlight certain truths. Stein captures the usefulness of this literary technique in dealing with the subject of divorce. His comments about *exaggeration* in the divorce sayings are extremely helpful in unraveling the mystery that surrounds some of the most difficult teachings in Christendom. He writes,

> Exaggeration used for effect. . . . A second example is the "exception clause" in Jesus' teaching on divorce. We find the teaching in its absolute form in three instances and with the exception clause in two. . . . Although some would argue the reverse, most scholars believe that the unqualified form of the saying in Mark, Luke, and 1 Corinthians is closer to Jesus' actual words than are the Matthean versions with the exception clause. In the three non-Matthean versions we have a more authentic teaching of Jesus on divorce. . . . We have already established that Jesus made frequent use of exaggeration. Is it possible that his sayings on divorce are an exaggeration, and that Matthew introduces the exception clause to bring out its true meaning?[250]

A statement that conflicts with what is said elsewhere may contain exaggeration. For instance, in the Synoptics and Pauline writings, there are differences that exist in the divorce sayings. How do we account for the *apparent* contradictions? If we are to understand *apparent* contradictions, as opposed to *real* contradictions, we have to look at the totality of God's Word. We must seek to understand exaggeration in light of its context. An example of exaggeration is found in Jesus' statement concerning one's relatives: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). Did Jesus mean this literally? How do we harmonize Luke 14:26 with Mark 7:9-13? When the Pharisees and some of the teachers of the Law entered into direct conflict with Jesus, He questioned them about their disregard for the commandment about honoring father and mother. Listen to Mark as he narrates the events:

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[248]Did Jesus give the *exemption clause* in His confrontation with the religious leaders as recorded by Mark and Luke? Both Mark 10:1-12 and Matthew 19:1-9 chronicle the same sketch. How do we account for the discrepancy? Which of the two recordings are original? If Jesus gave the *exemption clause*, we wonder why Mark and Luke left out this phrase. Did Jesus later discuss this absolute statement, as reported by Mark and Luke, with His disciples? Did He discuss this subject of divorce at a later time with His disciples in the same way He did with them about the "leaven of the Pharisees" (Matthew 16:5-12)? Did He explain His divorce saying in greater detail? Or did Matthew understand from the beginning that exaggeration or *overstatement* was involved in this divorce saying?

[249]Robert H. Stein, *Difficult Passages in the Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 130.

[250]Robert H. Stein, *Difficult Sayings in the Gospels: Jesus' Use of Overstatement and Hyperbole*, 48-49.

> And he said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe[c] your own traditions! [10] For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother,'[d] and, 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.'[e] [11] But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban' (that is, a gift devoted to God), [12] then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. [13]Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that." (Mark 7: 9-13)

In Mark 7:9, Matthew informs the readers that Jesus rebukes the Pharisees and teachers of the Law for not honoring their fathers and mothers. There is an *apparent* contradiction, not a *real* contradiction between Luke 14:26 and Mark 7:9. On the one hand, one is told to hate father and mother, but, on the other hand, one is told to honor them. What is the answer to this dilemma? Hating parents is obviously an *overstatement*. What did Jesus seek to emphasize with such a bold statement in Luke 14:26? Was it not to put God first in one's life?

Another *apparent*, though not *real*, contradiction appears in Luke 6:27-36. In the Sermon on the Plain, Jesus addresses the attitude that His disciples should exemplify in their lives:

> But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, [28]bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. [29]If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. [30]Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. [31] Do to others as you would have them do to you. [32]If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. [33] And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. [34]And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full. [35] But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. [36]Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. (Luke 6:27-36)

How do we reconcile Luke 6:27-36 with Luke 14:26 (see above citation)? We simply accept the statements in Luke 14:26 and Luke 6:27-36 as true and we must. On the surface, there is an *apparent* contradiction, even though not a *real* contradiction. Unless we accept one of these statements as *overstatement*, then, there is contradiction. By Jesus employing *overstatement* in Luke 14:26, He effectively brings home His intent—God is preeminent.

Another example of *overstatement* is found in Matthew 5:42. Jesus says: "Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you." Did Jesus intend for this Scripture to authorize an individual's demand for money without any discrimination on the part of the giver? How many are willing to follow this saying as an absolute statement that is binding on the person being asked? Are there no reservations in lending a helping hand? Have we ever turned away someone? If so, have we violated Jesus' command in Matthew 5:42? If you interpret this literally and not as *overstatement*, would you please send me your telephone number immediately—and I mean now! Do I sense hesitation? Isn't it strange how quickly we can see an *overstatement* in this command of Jesus when it concerns money?

What is Jesus seeking to emphasize with such a bold statement? Is He not going straight to the "jugular vein" of covetousness? Does Jesus want greed to die? It appears that Jesus desires us to share with those who are less fortunate than ourselves. James, our Lord's brother, also captures the essence of Jesus' words when he writes:

> What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? [15] Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. [16] If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? (James 2:14-16)

Again, it is necessary to compare Jesus' statement in Matthew 5:42 with Paul's statement to the Thessalonians. He forcefully writes:

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[c] Some manuscripts *set up*
[d] Exodus 20:12; Deut. 5:16
[e] Exodus 21:17; Lev. 20:9

> For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." [11] We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. [12] Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat. [13] And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right. [14] If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. [15] Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother. (2 Thessalonians 3:10-15)

Is there a contradiction between the words of Jesus and the words of Paul? On the surface there is an *apparent* contradiction, but not a *real* contradiction. Jesus captures the attention of His listeners and forcefully brings home God's distaste for covetousness. Jesus could have mentioned "exemptions" to His statement in Matthew 5:42, but this elaboration would have taken away from the focal point—namely, our tightfistedness.

Another example of exaggeration is Jesus' admonition about prayer: "But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you" (Matthew 6:6). Does Jesus forbid public prayers? Does not Jesus use *overstatement* to illustrate that praying is not to be done to be seen of men and women? Whatever work of righteousness we do must be performed to God's glory, not for self or for man or woman. We must never carry out good works to acquire praise from others. Jesus warns His disciples against pretentious works: "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven" (Matthew 6:1).

Yet, on the other hand, in this same Sermon, Jesus encourages the disciples to do good works: "Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:15-16). Here again there is an *apparent* contradiction, but not a *real* contradiction. Jesus uses *overstatement* to emphasize that performance of religious acts must come from the heart. In other words, Jesus is saying that personal prayer is not for display and neither are works for exhibition. Our acts of righteousness are matters between us and God.

Scripture abounds in the use of *overstatement* and *exaggeration* to underscore God's real intention. For instance, consider Jesus' use of *overstatement* to highlight the importance of eliminating sin from one's life:

> If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. [30]And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell. (Matthew 5:29-30)

Does Jesus teach that we must mutilate our bodies? This statement about mutilation of body parts is a classic example of *overstatement* in the teachings of Jesus. *Overstatemen*t and *hyperbole* abound in Jesus' teachings in the Synoptics. Is there a distinction between these two forms of exaggeration? Yes! An *overstatement* is an exaggeration that is literally <u>possible</u> but *hyperbole* is literally <u>impossible</u>. To illustrate this separation, consider the following words of Jesus: "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Matthew 19:24). Jesus employs *hyperbole* to press home a point. Although a camel cannot go through the "eye of a needle" (*hyperbole*), nevertheless, a rich man can be saved. The point of this *hyperbole* is to emphasize with the absurd the difficulty of a rich person being saved. On the other hand, Jesus uses *overstatement* to draw attention to a central point without drawing attention to exemptions, which would weaken His emphasis. We could literally gouge out ours eyes (*overstatement*), and we could literally cut off our hands (*overstatement*), but, on the other hand, a camel cannot go through the "eye of a needle" (*hyperbole*). *Hyperbole* and *overstatement* were employed as teaching techniques by Jesus to capture the attention of His listeners.

Overstatements in the Divorce Sayings

Overstatement is apparently the answer to the much debated divorce sayings in the Synoptics. Jesus frequently employs various methods to inculcate, or instill, His truths. The divorce sayings as reported by

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul may very well have included these procedures to stress the importance of the institution of marriage. By comparing all of the divorce sayings, we can safely conclude that Jesus uses exaggeration for calling attention to the original design of marriage. If we apply the same principles to the divorce sayings that we have applied to other sayings of Jesus, we can then arrive at a working postulate upon which to form a judgment about the propriety or impropriety of divorce and remarriage for reasons other than sexual immorality.

In our study of the divorce sayings, we can rule out *hyperbole*. Divorce is something we can do, that is to say, it is possible, not impossible. We can divorce with or without God's blessings. It appears that the words of Jesus are simply *overstatement*. A perusal of the divorce sayings in the Synoptics and Pauline writings reveals that the divorce accounts do not agree. Observe the following accounts:

> Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. [12]And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery. (Mark 10:11-12)

> Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. (Luke 16:18)

> But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery. (Matthew 5:32)

> I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery. (Matthew 19:9)

> But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace. (1 Corinthians 7:15)

Neither Mark nor Luke takes notice of the "marital unfaithfulness" phrase as grounds for divorce. On the other hand, Matthew introduces the exemption clause ("marital unfaithfulness") twice. Then, in addition to the "marital unfaithfulness" clause, Paul adds "desertion" as an additional reason.[251] What does all of this mean? How can we harmonize *apparent* contradictions, not *real* contradictions—with the above citations? When we compare Scripture with Scripture, we can often learn whether a particular saying is an exaggeration or a specific command. The question might be asked, why would Jesus introduce exaggeration in the divorce sayings?

It appears that Jesus implements exaggeration to accentuate certain truths. Why is it that neither Mark nor Luke journaled the exemption clause? We wonder if the teachings of Jesus, as journaled by Mark and Luke, fall under *overstatement*. Since neither Mark nor Luke registers the exemption clause, is it possible that Jesus employs *overstatement*? Recognition of this teaching technique of exaggeration enables us to more accurately interpret the intent of the author. An awareness of exaggeration in the Scriptures will assist us in seeking biblical answers to the baffling question of divorce and remarriage that has plagued the church for centuries. It is obvious that there are no "pat" answers to this dilemma.

MERCY VERSUS LAW

The second aspect of this chapter deals with *mercy* taking precedence over *law*. Even if exaggeration (granted for the sake of argument) is not involved in the divorce sayings as advanced in the beginning of this chapter, nevertheless, there is still the principle of *mercy* over *law* coming into play. To illustrate this principle of *mercy* over *law*, a number of illustrations are presented to call attention to this vital concept of *mercy* taking precedence over *law* in dealing with the many problems individuals face in the marital relationship. Adultery or

[251]Does *marital unfaithfulness* include *desertion*? Does *marital unfaithfulness* include "wife-battering"? Is the word "fornication" more comprehensive in its total meaning than just *sexual immorality*?

fornication is not always the issue in the dissolution of the marriage bond. To illustrate this principle of *mercy* taking precedence over *law*, the story of David and the Bread of the Presence is analyzed.

David and the Bread of the Presence

How do David and the Bread of the Presence help us in understanding the divorce sayings in the Synoptics and Paul? Hopefully, an analysis of this episode will shed light from which we may draw principles upon which to base biblical decisions. Again, even if exaggeration is not found in the divorce sayings, we may consider *mercy* as another alternative to our dilemma in dealing with divorce. *Mercy* over *law* is another aspect we need to analyze in seeking an answer to the perplexing problems surrounding divorce and remarriage. To paint a picture about the righteousness of *mercy* taking preference over the righteousness of *law*, we only need to read about David and the twelve loaves of bread in the Holy Place.

Matthew records Jesus' reference to an incident that occurred in the days of Abiathar the high priest. Behind this scene lies the original statement respecting the eating of the sacred bread. Moses gave instructions concerning the "bread of the Presence"—it belonged only to Aaron and his sons, that is, only to the priests:

> Take fine flour and bake twelve loaves of bread, using two-tenths of an ephah[a] for each loaf. 6 Set them in two rows, six in each row, on the table of pure gold before the LORD. 7Along each row put some pure incense as a memorial portion to represent the bread and to be an offering made to the LORD by fire. 8This bread is to be set out before the LORD regularly, Sabbath after Sabbath, on behalf of the Israelites, as a lasting covenant. 9It belongs to Aaron and his sons, who are to eat it in a holy place, because it is a most holy part of their regular share of the offerings made to the LORD by fire. (Leviticus 24:5-9)

This consecrated bread was preserved only for the priests, no one else. Moses did not enter any "exemptions" to this rule. But we do read of an incident in the life of David where he and his men did eat of the consecrated bread because of hunger. This story is found in First Samuel:

> David went to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. Ahimelech trembled when he met him, and asked, "Why are you alone? Why is no one with you?" 2David answered Ahimelech the priest, "The king charged me with a certain matter and said to me, 'No one is to know anything about your mission and your instructions.' As for my men, I have told them to meet me at a certain place. 3Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever you can find." 4But the priest answered David, "I don't have any ordinary bread on hand; however, there is some consecrated bread here—provided the men have kept themselves from women." 5 David replied, "Indeed women have been kept from us, as usual whenever[a] I set out. The men's things[b] are holy even on missions that are not holy. How much more so today!" 6So the priest gave him the consecrated bread, since there was no bread there except the bread of the Presence that had been removed from before the LORD and replaced by hot bread on the day it was taken away. (1 Samuel 21:1-6)

Jesus uses this circumstance to explain by example the principle of *mercy* over *law*. Matthew cites the first face-to-face confrontation of the religious leaders with Jesus in Matthew 12. The Pharisees rebuked His disciples for picking some heads of grain on the Sabbath because they were hungry. Mark, as well as Luke, also tells about this showdown. We must consider carefully the parallel accounts of Jesus' encounter with the religious leaders in dealing with the subject of divorce and remarriage. We learn a great deal about *mercy* taking the lead over *law*. It appears that many Christians are as blind as were the Pharisees in this skirmish with Jesus over the *traditions of the elders*. The following are the three accounts of the David episode as reported by Matthew, Mark, and Luke:

> At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. 2When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath." 3 He answered, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry?

[a] That is, probably about 4 quarts (about 4.5 liters)
[a] Or *from us in the past few days since*
[b] Or *bodies*

[4]He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. [5]Or haven't you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? [6]I tell you that one[a] greater than the temple is here. [7]If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,'[b] you would not have condemned the innocent. [8]For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." (Matthew 12:1-8)

One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as his disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. [24] The Pharisees said to him, "Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" [25]He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? [26]In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions." [27]Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. [28]So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."
(Mark 2:23-28)

One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and his disciples began to pick some heads of grain, rub them in their hands and eat the kernels. [2]Some of the Pharisees asked, "Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" [3]Jesus answered them, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? [4]He entered the house of God, and taking the consecrated bread, he ate what is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions." [5]Then Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." (Luke 6:1-5)

Jesus said that David and his men did that which "was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests" (Matthew 12:4; Mark 2:25-26; Luke 6:4). In other words, in today's parlance, it was "unscriptural," as we would say within many fellowships of God's people. In spite of this unlawfulness though, Jesus illustrates that it is always lawful to be humane and to save life. In other words, such compassionate acts are within the true "spirit of the law." Under normal circumstances, God would have condemned David for his disobedience to Moses' command, but because of the critical situation of need for food, compassion took supremacy over statute law.

Matthew also adds another detail, which neither Mark nor Luke records, concerning Jesus' confrontation with the religious leaders: "If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:7-8). In other words, Jesus is stressing mercy over the Sabbath. It is also significant that neither Matthew nor Luke adds: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). With this statement, Jesus highlights the priority of men and women over law. Jesus' forcefully sets forth the concept that men and women were not made for law, but rather, law was created for their benefit. Ordinarily, we would keep the Sabbath, but, on the other hand, there could be mitigating conditions in which mercy would take rank over the Sabbath. The implication is that we must understand that men and women were not brought into being to keep the Sabbath, but the Sabbath was conceived for their welfare. If in the keeping of the Sabbath, it would be detrimental to men and women, then, grace takes the lead over the Sabbath.

Principles Applied to Marriage Bond

Is this a principle that one could apply to the marriage bond when one finds himself or herself in an impossible situation? Was man or woman made for marriage? Or was marriage made for their benefit? It appears that the "tradition of the elders" is still alive and well on planet earth. Many still do not understand that men and women were not made for law, but law was made for their benefit (Mark 2:27). Many Christians, especially elders and preachers, still exercise the same kind of self-righteousness the Pharisees exhibited when they condemn the innocent party in a divorce when the offended person refuses to continue to live in an environment that is dangerous, risky, and hazardous to his or her well-being.[252] We must never forget that the

[a] Or *something*; also in verses 41 and 42

[b] Hosea 6:6

[252]The attitude of the religious leaders in this episode of adherence to the traditions of the elders reminds one of the self-righteousness the Pharisees exhibited on numerous occasions in their rebuke of Jesus.

Son of Man is Lord of the initial institution of marriage as well as Lord of the Sabbath. It is true that God intends one man and one woman for life. Nevertheless, God, because of sin, that is to say, hardness of the heart of men and women (Matthew 19:8), did give a safety valve (divorce) for an impossible situation (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

Jesus brought to the attention of the religious leaders the original intent of marriage. In the Garden of Eden, there was no need of a law concerning the marriage covenant, but after sin entered, God dealt with divorce because of the sinfulness of human beings (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). It is in this same vein that God dealt with murder. After Adam's and Eve's expulsion from their Edenic home, God issued instructions about those who took another person's life (Genesis 9:6). Prior to this expulsion, there was no need to address this issue—sin had not yet entered the world. Thus, in Deuteronomy, Moses records what the Lord revealed to him concerning the unthinkable conditions in marriage. Even when Moses says, "and he writes her a certificate of divorce" (Deuteronomy 24:1), it was still God's design that there be one man and one woman for life (Matthew 19:4-6).

Again, men and women were not made for marriage, but marriage was initiated for their happiness. The original purpose in marriage is still one man and one woman for life; but since sin entered the world, there may be mitigating situations in which *mercy* takes supremacy over God's initial meaning of the institution of marriage. In other words, God in his *mercy* makes provisions for the dissolution of marriages when the hardness of the heart prevails (Matthew 19:8; Deuteronomy 24:1-4).[253]

Thus far, *exaggeration* and *mercy* have been considered in seeking answers to the complexities encountered in the ending of the marriage bond. Can we exclude *exaggeration* and *mercy* as possible answers for our dilemma in a dangerous relationship? Is there another alternative for the dissolution of marriage when we are confronted with an absolute statement about divorce that does not set forth exemptions? What do we do with an absolute statement when no exemptions are made? Since the statements about marriage and divorce in both Mark and Luke are absolute, can we find relief from a hopeless situation in marriage? Before proceeding with an analysis of the absoluteness of the divorce sayings, it is in order to consider another graphic case of physical abuse.

CASE THREE**.** On December 12, 1988, Hedda Nussbaum appeared on the coversheet of *Newsweek.*[254] This is the story of two persons who lived together, but were not, as I understand it, married. Nevertheless, this case still serves as a vivid illustration of the predicament that women face in the real world of men. This scenario is still the same as countless women who are married can testify. If the two had been married, would she have had a valid reason to divorce her husband? Before one makes a decision, he or she should read the "rest of the story," as Paul Harvey would say. Ann Jones writes about Hedda Nussbaum's picture that appeared on the cover of Newsweek on December 12, 1988 following her arrest:

> There had been other "battered women" on the covers of other magazines—Ms. For one—pretty, posed models, delicately bruised with makeup in subtle tones of mauve and heliotrope, their eyes cast down in simulation of shame or sadness. But nothing like this. Hedda Nussbaum was the real thing. The photo was shot as she testified against her companion of twelve years, Joel Steinberg, who was charged with murder for beating to death the six-year-old girl the couple had illegally "adopted." (Hired as an attorney to place the child, Steinberg simply took her home.) Hedda Nussbaum's bruises had healed and the discolorations faded, but her face remained permanently scarred and misshapen, remodeled first by Joel Steinberg and subsequently by Dr. Monte Keen, plastic surgeon—the man-made face of America's most famous battered woman.[255]

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[253]Does Matthew 5:31-32 and Matthew 19:1-9 contradict Deuteronomy 24:1-4?

[254]See Ann Jones, *Next Time, She'll Be Dead: Battering & How to Stop It* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1994), 167-198, for detailed information about her torture from her companion of twelve years, Joel Steinberg. See also "Interview with Hedda Nussbaum with Larry King Live/ June 16, 2003" [ONLINE]. Available from http://www.rickross.com/reference/abusive/abusive1.html (accessed 25 July 2008). This report is a twenty-three page interview, which gives many details concerning circumstances surrounding this case. See also *The New York Times* [ONLINE]. Available from http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/n/hedda_nussbaum/index.html (accessed 25 July 2008).

[255] *Next Time, She'll Be Dead*, 167.

I remember my first impression about this story. I thought she and her husband ought to be put to death, but, I made judgments without knowing the full story. "That face made some people weep. It made others want to destroy her, especially women. Put her on trial, they said. Lock her up. Get rid of her. Just look at what she let him do to her. Look at what she let him do to her child," writes Jones.[256] After the jury heard only the part that the judge would allow—not the whole story of abuse—they emerged from the jury room on January 30th with a verdict—Not Guilty of murder—but Guilty of manslaughter in the first degree.

Jones reports that at the time Hedda Nussbaum met Joel Steinberg, "She was thirty-two, good-looking, a rising editor of children's books at Random House, and he was thirty-three, good-looking, a lawyer, and (like Nussbaum) Jewish."[257] This is a description of Nussbaum when she met Steinberg in 1975.[258] When she was arrested on November 2, 1987, a doctor from the New York University Medical Center, who examined her from head to toe on November 3, 1987, described the forty-five year old woman to the jury as

> anemic, debilitated, malnourished, wasted, limping, and hunch-backed from osteoporosis. He found "old and new lacerations on her scalp, chunks of hair torn out from the right side of her head, an old ulceration and a new fracture on her nose, a black eye, lacerated upper lip, three- or four-month old fractures on both cheekbones, a scar on the abdomen, bruises on the abdomen and back, eight fractured right ribs, seven fractured left ribs, a very large new bruise on the right hip with many scarred areas around it, old abrasion on the left leg, and two deep, three-inch-wide ulcers on the right leg, which was infected, partly gangrenous, and red and swollen from foot to knee." The ulcerated lesions on Nussbaum's lower right leg were 'potentially fatal' injuries, the doctor said, which if untreated "could have led to blood poisoning and cardiovascular collapse."[259]

Jimmy Breslin wrote in *Newsday*, "She looked as if she had just fought Fritzie Zivic in Pittsburgh. Fritzie used to get his thumb into an eye and turn it like he was dialing a phone number."[260] Again, Jones says that Paul Hamill of the *New York Post was* "most shocked by the nose." He also wrote, "This is the nose of an old pug, some club-fighting veteran of the St. Nicholas Arena or Eastern Parkway, battered and hurt and healed and hurt again, until it is no longer the nose worn when young."[261] The prosecutor Peter Casolaro wanted Nussbaum to tell the jury about some of Steinberg's assault, but Judge Harold Rothwax decided that the jury could not hear about his history of abuse for fear that that knowledge would inflame the jury. Prior to Nussbaum's testimony, Casolaro outlined thirty-two incidents of assaults. The newspapers printed summaries. The following is a list of atrocities taken from *Newday's* "Catalog of Abuse," cited in Jones:

1. March 17, 1978. The first time Steinberg struck Nussbaum, hitting her in the eye with an open hand. She required hospital treatment. Admitted into evidence.
2. In 1978. Steinberg gave Nussbaum at least ten black eyes.
3. Feb. 4, 1981. Steinberg ruptured Nussbaum's spleen in a beating. She had to go to St. Vincent's Hospital to have it removed. Admitted into evidence.
4. In 1982. Steinberg beat Nussbaum and she sought treatment at St. Vincent's for broken ribs.
5. In 1983. Steinberg used a broomstick to beat her on the feet, causing injury and scars.
6. Late 1983 through 1984. Steinberg beat her severely and repeatedly during this period. Her face was disfigured, her nose broken, and her ear cauliflowered. Steinberg restricted her movements, presumably so her injuries would not be noticed. Once, when she phoned her father for help, Steinberg threw her down. This point admitted into evidence. Feb. 11, 1984. Her knee was broken in a beating and she limped to Bellevue Hospital for treatment. April 14, 1984. She was beaten and ran away.
7. In 1984. Steinberg kicked Nussbaum in the eye, producing serious injury.
8. In 1984. Steinberg hit Nussbaum in the eye, leaving her with a swollen eye.
9. In 1984. Steinberg beat Nussbaum after she refused to take a cold bath and then threw her into the bath with her clothes on. She ran away.
10. In 1984. Steinberg choked Nussbaum, damaging her vocal cords.

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[256] Ibid., 168.
[257] Ibid., 182.
[258] Ibid.
[259] Ibid., 168-169.
[260] Ibid.
[261] Ibid.

11. August 1984. Steinberg gave Nussbaum a black eye. She lost her job with Random House while staying home to recuperate. Admitted into evidence.
12. Late 1984 to early 1985. Steinberg used a blowtorch used for freebasing to burn Nussbaum, leaving scars.
13. Late 1984. Steinberg took a bath with Nussbaum and then beat her "brutally."
14. Late 1984. Steinberg used a broomstick handle to beat her hands, leaving them permanently injured.
15. In 1985. Steinberg used a stick to beat Nussbaum's sexual organs, causing them to swell for several months. In a subsequent beating, she hemorrhaged.
16. In 1985. Steinberg urinated on Nussbaum twice after throwing her to the floor.
17. Same as number 16.
18. September 1985. Steinberg handcuffed Nussbaum in the bathroom and forced her to sleep there.
19. In 1985. Steinberg handcuffed Nussbaum to a chinning bar in the bedroom and told her to sleep there.
20. In 1985. Steinberg struck Nussbaum, chipping or knocking out teeth.
21. Late 1985 to early 1986. Steinberg knocked her down and she cut her wrist by falling against a filing cabinet, causing injury and scarring.
22. In 1986. Steinberg hit Nussbaum, knocking out more teeth.
23. In 1986. Steinberg beat up Nussbaum in a car on the way to visit his mother.
24. In 1986. Steinberg hit her head against a wall, causing her to bleed.
25. Late 1986 through 1987. Steinberg beat Nussbaum repeatedly with a metal exercise bar, especially during the two months before Lisa Steinberg's death on Nov. 5, 1987. Admitted into evidence.
26. In 1987. Steinberg struck Nussbaum with his open hand, splitting her lip repeatedly.
27. In 1987. Steinberg broke her nose again in a beating.
28. October 1987. Steinberg grabbed her by one ankle and one wrist and bounced her on the floor, severely bruising her buttocks.
29. Late 1987. When Nussbaum refused to take a cold bath, Steinberg threw her into the bathtub with her clothes on.
30. In 1987. Steinberg pulled her hair out numerous times.
31. October 1987. Steinberg repeatedly poked his fingers in Nussbaum's eyes, lacerating her nose once.
32. During the last nine years the couple lived together the physical abuse continued with regularity, a persistent tool used ... to control Miss Nussbaum, or ... to break her will.[262]

Only four of the thirty-two barbarities committed against her were admitted into evidence during the trial. He received a sentence of 8 1/3 to 25 years for killing the child Lisa—no punishment for what he did to Miss Hedda Nussbaum.[263] One additional report of this case is given to make individuals aware of the problems that many individuals face in the "ends and outs" of everyday life. Ronald Sullivan wrote in The Metropolitan News the following account of the atrocities committed against Miss Nussbaum:

- At the direction of a female detective, Ms. Nussbaum, dressed in a dark turtleneck sweater and blue jeans, displayed her injuries to the camera, pulling up her sweater and pulling down her pants in the process. As one juror winced at the sight and others shook their heads in disbelief, the tape showed massive cuts and bruises and evidence of other injuries all over Ms. Nussbaum's body. For example, a dark bruise the size of a saucer was on her right buttock. Her right wrist was deformed, where a broken bone had healed incorrectly. Deep green ulcerations covered the length of her right leg. The condition of that leg caused one juror to gasp in shock.
- Earlier two prosecution witnesses told the jury that Ms. Nussbaum appeared to have just suffered a savage beating when detectives and a child-abuse worker tried to question her and Mr. Steinberg about Lisa's injuries. "Her nose was caved in; her face was swollen; she was a mass of black-and-blue marks," said Joseph Petrizzo, a child-abuse caseworker in the New York City Bureau of Special Services for Children.
- "She had a broken nose, blackened eyes, a split lip, and big clumps of her hair were missing," said Robert Columbia, a police detective assigned to sex crimes and child-abuse cases. "She was limping and she looked dazed and confused."
- Charges of murder against Ms. Nussbaum have been dismissed on the ground that she was so beaten she was incapable of saving Lisa from death (their daughter). Ms. Nussbaum is expected to be the main prosecution witness.[264]

What reaction should we exercise toward those who find themselves in an impossible situation of such cruelty? Do we say, "Adultery not involved, still bound for life"? The response of many preachers and elders today is the height of "legalism." It is on par with the religious leaders of Jesus' day, perhaps even worse. The

[262] Ibid., 170-173.
[263] Ibid., 197.
[264] Ronald Sullivan, "Jurors See Graphic Tape of Nussbaum," *Metropolitan News* 4 November 1988, 1 (B) and 6 (B).

"letter of the law" is the battle cry of many, no mercy—just law. Let God's people turn once more to Holy Scripture for a biblical solution. A biblical example should help us in seeking a biblical solution to such a baffling problem for many Christians.

The case of David and the "Bread of the Presence," as discussed above, is worthy of recall in analyzing the above scenario of physical abuse. This example still provides an excellent illustration of "absolute statement" when dealing with extenuating circumstances that allows for *mercy* to take superiority over *law*. We find an absolute statement concerning the eating of consecrated bread with no mention of exemptions. The Law is absolute, no mention of exemptions. But when Jesus called forth this case in His dealing with the religious leaders, we quickly observe that Jesus indicates that David was without guilt: "If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent" (Matthew 12:7). Jesus informed the religious leaders that because of extenuating circumstances surrounding David's predicament that God overrode *law* with *mercy* (A principle that many of our religious leaders have not yet learned.).

Although there are absolute statements[265] concerning the dissolution of marriage, does this fact indicate, in and of itself, that there cannot be exemption from the marriage bond for any reason other than sexual immorality? Does an absolute statement about divorce and remarriage exclude one from divorcing his or her spouse for abuse, child abuse, murder, robbery, fornication, or adultery? Does the innocent party have any recourse for the wickedness of a husband or wife?

Many wives and husbands have been poisoned, brutally beaten, stabbed—even to the point of paralysis or death—and others shot or killed. Is it God's design in marriage to have a woman or a man to live with a monster or maniac simply because he or she did not engage in sexual relations outside the marriage bond? Many would say yes, but, in spite of the consensus of many, we should still analyze any absolute statement in its *intended application*. If God did not legislate specifically concerning the above issues, then one should rely upon principles set forth in the Scriptures to make a valid judgment concerning divorce for other reasons *than sexual immorality*.

Legalistic Approach to This Dilemma

It is not uncommon for Christians to treat the Scriptures with the same legality that the religious leaders did in the days of Jesus. Just as the Pharisees used their Scriptures in an illegal manner to uphold their traditions, many Christians, unconsciously, do the same in their exposition of the divorce sayings. We should again reflect upon the confrontation of Jesus with the Pharisees in Matthew 12:1-12, in which Jesus reminds the Pharisees that David and his companions violated God's Law, but were not condemned.

Why were they not doomed? Well, Jesus informs the religious leaders that there may be extenuating circumstances in which mercy takes precedence over Law. In this encounter, Jesus also calls attention to the principle of mercy over Law by reminding them of the Sabbath. Jesus penetrates their façade of hypocrisy by saying, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). In other words, Jesus says that under the normal state of affairs, one would adhere to the Sabbath regulations, but there may be controlling factors in which mercy takes supremacy over Law.

The relationship between the Old Testament incident of David (1 Samuel 21:1-6) and the *apparent* infringement of the Sabbath day by the disciples lies in the fact that on both occasions godly men did something forbidden—one by God, the other by man (traditions of the elders). Since, however, it is always "lawful" to do good and to save life (even on the Sabbath), both David and the disciples were within the "spirit" of the Law (see Isaiah 58:6-7; Luke 6:6-11; 13:10-17; 14:1-6). The same reasoning may be applied to other commands from God—including marriage and divorce. Neither man nor woman was made for the "marriage law," but the

[265]An analysis of the divorce sayings appears to be ***overstatement*** rather than absolute statements. But for the sake of argument, should one advance the concept that the divorce sayings in Mark and Luke are not ***overstatements***, then, one must deal with the concept of absolutes. Does an absolute statement about divorce forbid the dissolution of marriage under certain circumstances?

"marriage law" was made for their welfare. Again, there may be mitigating circumstances in which mercy takes level standing over law. Larry Richard's statement about the principles of mercy is to the point:

> David's need was seen by God as more important than the law's regulation. And the priest's service to Israel was, of course, more important than the Sabbath prohibition against work. In each case a principle of mercy—of deep concern for human need—took precedence over what was technically a violation of the law. David and the priests broke the law but were adjudged innocent.
>
> Isn't it possible that those who suffer the tragedy of divorce and who remarry do commit adultery, as David committed sacrilege, and yet are adjudged innocent? Doesn't the law's provision of divorce and its expectation of remarriage suggest that God can and does deal with divorce and remarriage with a mercy quite unlike the attitude of ancient and modern Pharisees who are preoccupied with legalities...? It is here (Matthew 19) that Jesus points out that divorce was permitted because human hearts are hard, not because God desires divorce. Divorce was an expression of God's mercy, not an affirmation of his ideal will.[266]

SCENARIO OF JESUS AND THE PHARISEES

What are we to do with *apparent* contradictory statements existing in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul? To understand the teachings of Jesus on this subject, we must consider the scenario of Jesus' confrontation with the Pharisees. First, Matthew informs his readers that the religious leaders came to Jesus when He entered the region of Judea to the other side of the Jordan. Second, the Pharisees asked questions about divorce, not because they wanted to know what God had said, but rather to test Him: "Some Pharisees," writes Matthew, "came to him to test him" (Matthew 19:3).

Jesus, upon being asked His view—"Some Pharisees came and tested him by asking, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife'" (Mark 10:2)—realized that the whole debate was focusing upon speculations about when the divine plan for marriage can be ignored. Jesus, out of regard for the basic plan and purpose of God in marriage, replied abruptly, "It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law" (Mark 10:5). In so responding to the Jewish leaders, Jesus is not concerned with hypothetical situations or exemptions. Rather, He is solicitous for the ideal design of God—one man and one woman for life (Mark 10:6-8).

In answer to the Pharisees' question about divorce, Jesus could have said, "It is written" (Matthew 4:4), and then cited the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 24:1-4. But in this confrontation, He did not exegete God's words on divorce to Moses, but rather, He took them back to the original institution of marriage before the fall (Genesis 1-3). A parallel to this marital legislation is the law concerning murder. After the "fall" in the Garden of Eden, God dealt with murder; God issued a death warrant for all those guilty of murder: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man" (Genesis 9:6). There was no reason for God to legislate concerning divorce and murder prior to the fall. But because of sin, God had to enact legislation to protect the innocent (Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

Jesus did not seek to lay down a legal pronouncement to cover every hypothetical crisis in the lives of men and women. To teach that He did is to read more into the text than Jesus himself taught. How does one know this? First, it is significant that Mark and Luke leave out the "exemption clause" (Mark 10:10; Luke 16:18). On the other hand, Matthew includes this controversial clause in the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus' battle with the Jewish leaders (Matthew 5:32; 19:9). Then, Paul, in his first letter to Corinth, sets forth "desertion" by the unbeliever as another "exemption clause" (1 Corinthians 7:15). Did he contradict the teachings of Jesus in Matthew 5:32 and 19:9? Did he contradict Mark 10:10 and Luke 16:18? Did he understand that Jesus was not giving a dissertation on marriage and divorce? Did he understand *overstatement* and *hyperbole* in the teachings of Jesus? Listen to Paul's advice about desertion: "But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to live in peace" (1 Corinthians 7:15). Would this principle also apply in wife battering? If not, why not?

[266]Lawrence O. Richards, *Expository Dictionary of the Bible Words* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 234-35.

Peace in the Messianic Age

In summary, the "divorce sayings" must be interpreted in light of their context and their intended meanings. It is not sufficient simply to quote a passage of Scripture and say this is what the Bible says. Very often the Bible does not mean what it says literally, that is, it may say one thing, but mean something else. To illustrate this principle, it is necessary to look at familiar passages in the book of Isaiah (11:6-9; 35:8-11) to highlight this proposition. We quickly observe that these two citations from Isaiah conflict with each other if interpreted literally.

Isaiah 11:6-9	Isaiah 35:8-10
The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. 7The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. 8The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. 9They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.	And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness. The unclean will not journey on it; it will be for those who walk in that Way; wicked fools will not go about on it. 9 No lion will be there, nor will any ferocious beast get up on it; they will not be found there. But only the redeemed will walk there, 10and the ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; Everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

A common interpretation of Isaiah 11:6-9 is that in the millenium kingdom, carnivorous animals will be transformed into herbivorous animals. But it is better to see this pericope (section) of Scripture as an exaggerated picture of the happiness and serenity of the coming messianic age. Isaiah describes, in very picturesque language, the animals of the wild as living together with the more gentle animals. In one passage, the "lion" is there, yet, on the other hand, the passage in Isaiah 35:8-10 excludes nonpeaceful animals in the picture of bliss and peace. Both passages, though literally contradictory, call forth different analogies to express the same reality, that is to say, peace in the coming messianic age.

Swallowing Camels

In Matthew 23:24, Jesus says, "You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel." Observe that Jesus says that the religious leaders swallowed a camel. The question is, did they? We must be careful to distinguish between the *words* of Jesus and the *meaning* Jesus intended to convey to His listeners. In most instances, the *words* and their *meanings* are the same, that is, a literal fulfillment is meant. In "You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel," the *words* and their *meanings* are not the same. For one to take these words literally would be to lose sight of the meaning Jesus intended these expressions to communicate. Through the use of *hyperbole*, Jesus effectively heightened the effective nature of His thoughts. The purpose of exaggerated language is to create a greater impression and to stir His hearers to reflect more closely upon the reality of their hypocritical actions and to consider more firmly His teachings.

Sawdust in the Eyes

Through exaggeration, Jesus is able to create a picture that is unforgettable. For example, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?" Who can forget the figures of "sawdust" in one's eye and a "plank" in another eye. Who can forget the words of Jesus, "Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Matthew 19:24). Such pictures are long remembered. Jesus employed bold language to impress upon the hearer the seriousness of what He was telling them.

Peace on Earth

Another example of exaggeration is found in Jesus' announcement: "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword" (Matthew 10:34). How do we harmonize this pronouncement with other statements in Matthew, Mark and Luke? For instance, consider the following:

> Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. (Matthew 5:9)
>
> He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering." (Mark 5:34)
>
> As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it [42] and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes." (Luke 19:41-42)
>
> Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, [14]"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." (Luke 2:13-14)

If we interpret "I did not come to bring peace" literally, then, this contradicts Mark's and Luke's "peace" sayings. Also, a literal interpretation would not harmonize with Paul's letter to Rome: "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1). The context is the determining factor for Matthew 10:34. This sword did not have anything to do with politics or military action. Jesus employed the term "sword" as a metaphorical description of the division that faith in Christ often brings about; namely, the dissolution of the family unit when one member of the family becomes a Christian.

Praying in the Closet

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught His disciples to pray secretly: "But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen" (Matthew 6:6). Is this command to be interpreted literally? Is this not *overstatement*? Can one pray in public, even though this command tells one to "close the door and pray"? Jesus did not always pray in His closet.

> After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray. (Mark 6:46)
>
> One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. (Luke 6:24)
>
> About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. (Luke 9:28)

Children were also brought to Jesus for prayers:

> Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them. [14] Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." [15]When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there. (Matthew 19:13-15)

Neither Luke nor Mark mentions the prayers, but they do allude to Jesus' touching the children. No doubt He also prayed for and blessed the children.

Swearing

Another fine example of *overstatement* is Jesus' teaching on swearing. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says,

> Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.' [34]But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; [35]or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. [36]And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. [37] Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one. (Matthew 5:33-37)

Is this an absolute prohibition against swearing? Can Christians swear in court? Can a Christian swear when taking his or her driver's license? The Sermon on the Mount abounds with *overstatement*. On another occasion Jesus did not forbid total refrain from swearing. In His confrontation with the Pharisees, Jesus says,

> Woe to you, blind guides! You say, "If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath." [17]You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? [18] You also say, "If anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath." [19]You blind men! Which is greater: the gift, or the altar that makes the gift sacred? [20]Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it. [21]And he who swears by the temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it. [22]And he who swears by heaven swears by God's throne and by the one who sits on it. (Matthew 23:16-22)

In this scenario, Jesus condemns the view of the religious leaders in their willingness to swear by the temple or the altar as nothing. On the other hand, if they swore by the gold of the temple or the gift that they offered on the altar, then, the oath is binding. It is also worthy of observation that Jesus did not refuse to be placed under oath. To begin with, Jesus remained silent; but the high priest said, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God" (Matthew 26:63). Then Jesus no longer remained silent: "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matthew 26:64). Jesus responds in compliance with the Law: "If a person sins because he does not speak up when he hears a public charge to testify regarding something he has seen or learned about, he will be held responsible" (Leviticus 5:1).

Hating Parents

How do we determine if a statement or saying is *hyperbole* or *overstatement*? The study of parallel passages often sheds light in helping to determine exaggeration. It is apparent that the Gospel writers were not always concerned with the *ipsissima verba*, or the very words. We cannot always be sure that the Evangelist sought to convey the exact wording of Jesus' sayings. A good example is found in Luke 14:26 and its parallel in Matthew 10:37.

Luke 14:26	Matthew 10:37
If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple.	Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

Through Matthew's account, we are able to observe that Jesus' bidding to hate one's family, as recorded in Luke 14:26, was not meant to be taken literally but was an *overstatement* used for effectiveness. In this hate relationship, Jesus employs exaggeration to highlight the superiority of faithfulness to God over faithfulness to family ties, as is evident from the fact that Jesus' statement conflicts with His other clear statements about loving one's parents or enemies. We should compare the following accounts in order to see that an interpretation that requires a wooden literalness involves contradictions:

> And he said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe[c] your own traditions! [10]For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother,'[d] and, 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.'[e] [11]But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban' (that is, a gift devoted to God), [12]then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. [13]Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that." (Mark 7:9-13)

> You know the commandments: 'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, do not defraud, honor your father and mother.' (Mark 10:19)

> But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. (Luke 6:27)

Yes, Jesus must be exaggerating in Luke 14:26. Jesus employed *overstatement* in His encouraging His disciples to submit to the teachings of the Pharisees (Matthew 23:2-3). This statement conflicts with His teachings in Matthew 16:6; 16:11-12. On the surface there appears to be a *real* contradiction. But the contradiction is not *real* but only *apparent*.

Matthew 23:2-3	Matthew 16:6, 11-12
The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. [3]So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.	"Be careful," Jesus said to them. "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." How is it you don't understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees. [12]Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

When we seek to find in both passages an absolute reference to every single teaching of the Pharisees, do we find an unresolvable problem? In general, the teachings of Jesus were similar to that of the religious leaders. On the other hand, Jesus objected strenuously to the oral traditions of Pharisees and Scribes. Matthew writes:

> The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus and [2]saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were "unclean," that is, unwashed. [3](The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. [4]When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups,

[c] Some manuscripts *set up*
[d] Exodus 20:12; Deut. 5:16
[e] Exodus 21:17; Lev. 20:9

pitchers and kettles.[a]) [5] So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, "Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with 'unclean' hands?" [6] He replied, "Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: 'These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. [7]They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.'[b] [8] You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men." [9] And he said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe[c] your own traditions! [10]For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother,'[d] and, 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.'[e] [11]But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban' (that is, a gift devoted to God), [12]then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. [13]Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that." (Mark 7:1-13)

It is apparent that it is best to look upon these citations from Scripture as statements containing exaggeration to draw attention to certain aspects of the Pharisees' doctrines and practices—not a blanket endorsement or condemnation.

CONCLUSION

Since this chapter is about the *divorce sayings* in the Synoptics and Pauline accounts, it seems appropriate, once more, in concluding this study, to draw attention again to the "exception clause" in Jesus' teaching on divorce. One finds the teaching of divorce in its absolute form in three instances and also with the exception clause in three—two by Jesus, one by Paul. The following charts set forth the "absolute forms" as well as the "exception forms":

ABSOLUTE FORM	ABSOLUTE FORM	ABSOLUTE FORM
Mark 10:11	Luke 16:18	1 Corinthians 7:10-11
He answered, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her."	Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.	To the married I give this command (not I, but the Lord): A wife must not separate from her husband. [11] But if she does, she must remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband. And a husband must not divorce his wife.
EXECPTION FORM	**EXECPTION FORM**	**EXECPTION FORM**
Matthew 5:32	Matthew 19:9	1 Corinthians 7:15
But I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, causes her to become an adulteress, and	I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.	But if the unbeliever leaves, let him do so. A believing man or woman is not bound in such circumstances; God has called us to

[a] Some early manuscripts *pitchers, kettles and dining couches*
[b] Isaiah 29:13
[c] Some manuscripts *set up*
[d] Exodus 20:12; Deut. 5:16
[e] Exodus 21:17; Lev. 20:9

anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery.	live in peace.

As stated above, Jesus accuses the religious leaders of straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel (Matthew 23:24). Jesus says they swallowed a camel, period! The question is, did they? We must be careful to distinguish between the *words* of Jesus and the *meaning* Jesus intended to convey. In most instances, the "words" and their "meanings" are the same, that is, a literal fulfillment is meant. But in "You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel," the "words" and their "meanings" are not synonymous. For us to take these words literally would be to lose sight of the meaning Jesus intended these words to convey.

To take words in Mark (10:10) and Luke (16:18) literally would be to lose sight of their designed purpose. To take all the assertions of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount literally would be to lose sight of His contemplated aim. The language Jesus uses in His teaching is not an end—in and of itself—but an instrument by which He seeks to convey what He means. Should we say that one must not interpret the Bible literally? The answer is *yes* and *no*. Is this a catch twenty-two question? Dammed if you say *yes* and dammed if you say *no*! Stein correctly says, "The answer to this question is that we are to take the meaning of the Bible literally."[267] In other words, the *meaning* of the words and not simply the *words* themselves is to be considered in our interpretation. We, for example, may quote what the Bible says and not necessarily give the intended meaning.[268] The literal interpretation of many Scriptures would result in nonsense.

We should stop playing God with the lives of men and women. Many believers occupy the "throne of God" in their condemnation of those who do not concur with their particular brand of orthodoxy, or prevailing attitude. Some decisions have to be left up to the individual. Paul goes right to the very heart of the matter when he writes, "Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand" (Romans 14:4). As we conclude, the problem of divorce and remarriage is not an easy question to deal with. When someone finds himself or herself involved with a spouse who is guilty of some "unclean thing" (Deuteronomy 24:1-4; Matthew 5:32; 19:9; 1 Corinthians 7:15), we must exercise judgment based upon biblical principles. I wish to present one more case concerning mercy taking precedence, or priority, over law.

CASE FOUR. This chapter concludes with one additional scenario in which sexual immorality was not involved. After you read the story, please answer the question, is this young lady bound to her husband until he commits "fornication"? Does the principle of *mercy* take precedence over *law*? On June 24, 1981, the Montgomery Advertiser published the following article:

Woman struck by vehicle

A 19-year-old woman was struck by a motor vehicle on the Atlanta Highway Tuesday night and badly injured, according to police. The vehicle left the scene of the accident with the woman lying in the southbound turn lane near Fox Hollow Road, said Sgt. W.H. Pertree. Police learned of the accident when "somebody stopped" a patrol car "and told them somebody had been hit," Lt. B.J. Cleveland said. Police did not release the name of the woman Tuesday night. A St. Margaret's Hospital spokesman said the woman was in critical condition. The accident occurred at about 9:20. Cpl. Leion Sims said there were five or six people who saw the woman walking before she was struck, but "nobody we've come up with actually saw her get hit by the car." Doctors told Sims the woman was responding to treatment, although she was still unconscious at 12:30 a.m. Wednesday. Police hope to question her Wednesday morning.[269]

Well, what does the above article have to do with "wife battering"? Is this not a story about a "hit and run" accident? This article does not tell the whole story. The next day another article appeared that revealed the whole sordid story of wife abuse. She was brutally beaten by her husband. A few years after this inhuman treatment by her husband, I talked with this young woman and obtained photocopies of her ordeal in the

[267]Robert H. Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus' Teachings* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 11.

[268]For further details concerning this concept of just simply quoting a biblical passage without regard to context, see Dallas Burdette, "Bible Speaking" in *Ensign* 18, no. 5 (May 1990).

[269]"Woman struck by vehicle," in *Montgomery Advertiser* 24 June 1981. (I do not have the author's name or page number.)

hospital. The pictures taken by the police at the time of the accident (actually, wife beating) reveal a tremendous loss of blood. In fact, after viewing the pictures, I wondered how one could have lost so much blood and still lived. After you read the story, ask yourself this question, should she have gone back to her husband? If she leaves, is she still bound to him for the rest of her life since he did not commit adultery—he just tried to kill her? If she leaves, is she biblically bound to live a celibate life since he did not commit a sexual sin? The crime scene was horrendous; the blood in the pictures covered the length and breath of her body; she looked as if she had been in a tornado. Are you ready for the rest of the story? On June 25, 1981, the following article appeared:

City Woman Badly Beaten

> A 19-year-old woman, originally thought to be a victim of a hit-and-run accident, was the victim of a severe beating, police said today. Sandra Ann Cooper, 135 Turner Place, was found lying in the southbound lane of the 5100 block of the Atlanta Highway about 9:30 p.m. Tuesday, according to police reports. Ms. Cooper was in stable condition in St. Margaret's Hospital's intensive care until this morning, a hospital spokesman said. Sgt. H.C. Norton said the young woman was improving, but doctors said she was not coherent enough to talk to police. According to police reports, Ms. Cooper was struck several times on the head with a blunt object. She also suffered wounds to the left [should be to the right—RDB], reports shows. Police found the woman after a man stopped a patrol car and said "somebody had been hit," Norton said. Norton said police originally though she had been injured after being struck by a motor vehicle.[270]

As we reflect upon this inhumane treatment by the husband, what is your reaction? Is she bound in marriage to this man for the rest of her life simply because he did not have sexual relations with another woman? Is this a case in which the principle of mercy takes precedence over law? Do we react against divorce as an alternative to be released from a tyrant? Is our position the same as the Pharisees that Jesus encountered? Just how do we interpret the divorce sayings in the Synoptic and Pauline accounts? Would Jesus rebuke us today for our uncompromising attitude of wooden literalness in our interpretation of the divorce sayings? Are hyperboles or exaggerations or overstatements an important element in the teachings of Jesus? God help each of us to make the right choice with love and mercy as the guiding star.

The next chapter ("Judge Not") focuses upon Jesus' statement in the Sermon on the Mount concerning censorious, or hyper-critical, judgment. Chapter 9 is appropriate to nip-in-the-bud the kind of judgment that seeks to castigate believers who do not conform to the status quo of certain religious fellowships. God does not forbid judgment, but our judgment must be a judgment that is righteous. A censorious, or contemptuous, kind of judgment blocks the unity for which our Lord Jesus prayed. In the earlier chapters of this book, I have endeavored to exercise the spirit of toleration. Even though I deal with critical issues that cause divisions among God's people, I still do not question one's devotion and sincerity.

[270]"City Woman Badly Beaten," in *Montgomery Advertiser* 25 June 1981**.** (I do not have the author's name or page number.)

9

Judge Not

> We set out as a basic rule the premise that *a text cannot mean what it never could have meant to its author or his readers*. This is why exegesis must always come first. It is especially important that we repeat this premise here, for this at least establishes some parameters of meaning. This rule does not always help find out what a text *means*, but it does help to set limits as to what it cannot mean.[271]

Does Jesus forbid judging individuals in Matthew 7:1? Jesus' words about judging are favorite words of many individuals—and they should be. This judging is set forth in negative terms by our Lord: "Do not judge, or you too, will be judged." Alternatively, this command from Jesus is frequently violated by many sincere believers when they pass judgment on other believers who do not accept many of their odd interpretations of Scripture. One objective of this chapter is to analyze both the positive (righteous judgment) and negative (unrighteous judgment) implications drawn from this frequently cited text. It is not wrong to make judgments, but Jesus, in this passage, is speaking of judgment that is hypercritical judgment—a judgment that deals with external versus internal righteousness. Unconsciously, many believers violate this clear passage in their judgment of other sincere believers who do not belong to their particular community of orthodoxy.

Again, on the negative side, Christians frequently transgress this command of Jesus in their castigation of faithful children of God who refuse to kow-tow to the dictates of certain religious leaders, that is, leaders who espouse a particular interpretation of an isolated Scripture from its context. Justification for disobedience or setting aside of Matthew 7:1 is based upon two other Scriptures in this same chapter, namely, verses 6 and 15. These two Scriptures are called upon to bolster claims for chastisement over doctrinal issues, which doctrines are made a test of one's recognition into the local fellowship. How do we reconcile these two apparent contradictions?

In seeking an answer, we should focus upon the meaning of 7:1 in its intended meaning. "Judge Not" flashes like neon lights upon the minds of men and women when they do not want someone judging their ethical behavior. Georg Strecker, professor of New Testament at Georg August University, Gottingen, West Germany, explains the words this way: "The absolute prohibition of judging (**κρίνειν** [*krinein*]) leaves no room for harmonization attempts."[272] Is it biblical to pass judgment on other individuals?

What did Jesus intend to convey with this pronouncement? Does He prevent all judgment? Is there an evil judgment? Is there a righteous judgment? What is this judgment that Jesus speaks of in Matthew 7:1? Do we breach this text when we judge according to one's external or internal motivation for his or her acts of righteousness? Do we abuse Jesus' command when we judge others who do not see eye-to-eye with us in our interpretation of God's Word? If we wish a biblical answer to the apparent dilemma—not a real dilemma—we must consult the context to determine the kind of judgment that Jesus forbids. Otherwise, we will defy the intended meaning of Jesus' famous saying. Once more, Georg Strecker (1929-1994) has made the point clear:

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[271]Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 60.

[272]Georg Strecker, *The Sermon on the Mount: An Exegetical Commentary*, trans. O. C. Dean, Jr. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989), 143.

> The followers of Jesus, who are sworn to the commandment of love (cf. 5:38-48; 22:34-40), are forbidden any kind of judgment-passing that reduces one's neighbor to an object of one's own interest. For them, judging is precluded as an attitude that is identical with lovelessness.[273]

In the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord warns His people about judging others: "Do not judge, or you too will be judged" (Matthew 7:1). After World War II, Helmut Thielicke (1908-1986), professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology at the University of Hamburg, Germany, delivered a series of sermons on the Sermon on the Mount. In one of his many sermons, he calls attention to the travesty of people by saying: "A terrible uncertainty has come over the world since it has become a house of judgment. We face the utter bankruptcy of Judgment."[274] Today, the church of Jesus faces the "utter bankruptcy of Judgment" by its hypercritical judgment of other fellowships that do not always agree with the particular status of a local body of believers. Is all judgment wrong? If so, how do we reconcile what Jesus says concerning "dogs" and "pigs"? Listen to the words of Jesus: "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs" (7:6).

The judgment that Jesus condemns is the judgment of one who mounts the high horse over other people. The judgment of 7:1 is an inaccurate comparison of ourselves with others; it is a judgment within which we magnify our own virtue and superiority. Alexander Campbell (1788-1866), early leader in the Second Great Awakening of the religious movement that is known as the Restoration Movement, writes with insight as he tackles the kind of judging that is forbidden by 7:1. Pay attention to his comments:

> Amongst Christians there is now, as there was at the beginning a very great diversity in the knowledge of the Christian institution. There are babes, children, young men, and fathers in Christ now, as well as in the days of the Apostle John. This, from the natural gifts of God, from the diversities of age, education, and circumstances, is unavoidable. And would it not be just as rational and as scriptural to excommunicate one another, because our knowledge is less or greater than any fixed measure, as for differences of opinion or matters of speculation?
>
> Indeed, in most cases where proscription [imposed restraint, prohibition] and exclusions now occur in this country, the excluded are the most intelligent members of the society; and although no community will accuse a man because he knows more of his Bible than his brethren, and on this account exclude him from their communion; yet this, it is manifest, rather than heresy, (of which, however, for consistency's sake, he must be accused,) is, in truth, the real cause of separation.
>
> If God has bestowed better gifts or better opportunities on one man than another, by which he has attained more knowledge, instead of thanking God for his kindness to the community, they beg God to take him away; and if he will not be so unkind, they will at length put him from among them under the charge of heresy. In most instances the greatest error of which a brother can be guilty, is to study his Bible more than his companions—or, at least, to surpass them in his knowledge of the mystery of Christ.[275]

How do we account for this apparent discrepancy between 7:1 and 7:6, 15? How can we determine that another person is a "dog" or another person is a "pig" if there is no judgment on the part of the person making the decision? Does this judgment go against what Jesus earlier prohibited? Can we form an opinion on those who do not abide in the ethical teachings of Jesus? Is it proper to pass judgment on those who deny that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God? Yes, John does this in his first and second epistles. Paul also passes judgment upon a brother who has sexual relations with his father's wife (1 Corinthians 5).

On the other hand, we violate Jesus' command when we criticize and condemn someone who does not have flawless comprehension of God's Word, especially if that person's reading does not coincide with our explanation of the Scriptures? Again, Campbell's comments are worthy of citation, even though lengthy:

> But the grandeur, sublimity, and beauty of the foundation of hope, and of ecclesiastical or social union, established by the author and founder of Christianity, consisted in this, that THE BELIEF OF ONE FACT, and that upon the best

[273]Ibid.

[274]Helmut Thielicke, *Life Can Begin Again*, trans. John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963), 150.

[275]Alexander Campbell, "To Mr. William Jones, of London, Letter IV," *Millennial Harbinger* 6, no. 3 (March 1835): 112.

evidence in the word, is all that is requisite, as far as faith goes to salvation. The belief of this ONE FACT, and submission to ONE INSTITUTION expressive of it, is all that is required of Heaven to admission into the church.[276]

So long as unity of opinion was regarded as a proper basis of religious union, so long have mankind been distracted by the multiplicity and variety of opinions. To establish what is called a system of orthodox opinions as the bond of union was, in fact, offering a premium for new diversities in opinion, and for increasing, *ad infinitum*, opinions, sects, and divisions. And what is worse than all, it was establishing self-love and pride as religious principles, as fundamental to salvation, for a love regulated by similarity of opinion, is only a love to one's own opinion; and all the zeal exhibited in the defense of it, is but the pride of opinion. [277]

It is again and again asserted, in the clearest language, by the Lord himself, the Apostles Peter, Paul, and John, that he that believes the testimony that Jesus is the Christ, is begotten by God, may overcome the world, has eternal life, and is, on the veracity of God, be saved. This should settle the first point; and as to the second, it is disposed of in a similar manner; for the witnesses agree that whosoever confesses that Jesus is the Christ, and is baptized, should be received into the church; and not an instance can be produced of any person being asked for any other faith, in order to admission, in the whole New Testament.[278]

The New Testament was not designed to occupy the same place in theological seminaries that the carcasses of malefactors are condemned to occupy in medical halls—first doomed to the gibbet [gallows], and then to the dissecting knife of the spiritual anatomist. Christianity consists infinitely more in good works than in sound opinions; and while it is a joyful truth that he that believes and is baptized shall be saved, it is equally true that he that saith, "I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."[279]

This study is concerned about those reviews of Matthew 7:1 that are in conflict with the totality of God's Word. This examination is not examining the myth that one is never to judge one's beliefs or moral course of action,[280] but rather, the focus of this study investigates the violation practiced by many Christians in their excommunicating other believers who disagree with their exposition of Scripture. Within the Churches of Christ, perfection in understanding is often the criteria by which judgment is made as to whether a person is or is not in fellowship with a particular congregation. Yet, this interpretation is not just limited to the Churches of Christ, but many denominations practice this same mentality. Carl Ketcherside (1908-1989), reformer, editor, and author within the Churches of Christ, captures the insaneness of postulating fellowship upon unanimity of opinion:

Those who were in Christ in the days of the apostles were in error on many points. They were mistaken about a lot of things but they were not charged with "preaching another gospel." Freedom from error is not a condition of salvation else all men would be damned. We are not saved by attainment to a certain degree of knowledge but by faith in Christ Jesus. It is by belief of facts related to him, and not by grasp of abstract truth, that we are justified before God. Certainly it is not by performance of meritorious deeds nor by legalistic conformity. When we postulate a program of justification by knowledge we hang ourselves on the gallows we have constructed to rid ourselves of others, unless we are prepared to make ourselves even more ridiculous by affirming that we know as much as God.[281]

When we refuse communion with certain "interpretive communities" that do not share our understanding of Scripture, we violate the prayer of Jesus in John 17 and the words of the Holy Spirit in Romans 14 and 15 as well as 1 Corinthians 8. Approximately forty years ago, the fellowship that I had been associated with for seventeen years, dissociated themselves from me because I refused to draw lines of fellowship with other believers who did not believe that individual communion cups, Sunday school,

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[276] Alexander Campbell, "The Foundation of Hope and of Christian Union," *Christians Baptist*, Vol. 1, No. 9 (April 1824):177.

[277] Ibid., 176.

[278] Ibid., 177.

[279] Ibid., 178.

[280] The Sermon on the Mount addresses beliefs and ethical behavior that is not in keeping with the commandments of God. Everyone must stress holiness as a way of life—there is no middle of the road. Having said this, it is imperative that we do not identify the teachings in the Sermon on the Mount with our particular brand of orthodoxy. It is not uncommon for Christians to read their own interpretation into the various isolated Scriptures. One's explanation often depends on which denomination one belongs to. It is not unusual for sincere Christians to describe their "interpretive community" as the bearer of all truth.

[281] Carl Ketcherside, "Another Gospel," *Mission Messenger* 27, no 1 (January 1965): 6-7.

instrumental music in the public worship service, breaking the bread in the communion rather than pinching the bread, and using wine only in the communion or grape juice only in the communion were sinful. D. A. Carson's (b. 1946), research professor of the New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, comments are to the point in his explanation of Matthew 7:1:

> What then does Jesus mean by his imperative in Matthew 7:1, "Do not judge, or you too will be judged"? Much of the confusion here is resolved when the semantic range of the Greek word translated "judge" is understood. "To judge" can mean to discern, to judge judicially, to be judgmental, to condemn (judicially or otherwise). The context must determine the precise shade of meaning. The context here argues that the verse means, "do not be judgmental." Do not adopt a critical spirit, a condemning attitude. The same verb is found twice, with identical meaning, in Romans 14:10ff.: "You, then, why do you *judge* your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: 'As I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.' So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore, let us stop *passing judgment* on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way." Jesus himself commands, "Do not be judgmental."[282]

In order to get around the implications of Matthew 7:1, many Christians cite Matthew 7: 6 and 15 in order to nullify the implications of 7:1. In actuality, numerous believers violate Matthew 7:1 without realizing that they are doing what Jesus forbids. These three Scriptures demand that each Scripture be interpreted within its intended meaning. We must not assign a meaning to Matthew 7:1 that Jesus did not intend to convey. We cannot pit Scripture against Scripture. Jesus did not preclude all judgment. If Matthew 7:1 is interpreted without consulting the context, then the two following Scriptures present a problem for the exegete:

Matthew 7:6	Matthew 7:15
Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs. If you do, they may trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you to pieces	Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.

Religious leaders often cite verses 6 and 15 of chapter 7 in order to nullify 7:1. Yet the judgment of 7:1 had to do with a censorious judgment about doing righteous acts to be seen of men and women, not God. Jesus began His Sermon on the Mount with castigation of the religious leaders' hypocrisy: "I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (5:20). Again, Jesus deals with the righteousness of the Pharisees this way:

> Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. [2]So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. [3]But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, [4]so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (6:1-4)

Luke records an excellent commentary on Matthew 7:1. He writes his own comments and then cites the words of Jesus concerning censorious judgment:

> To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: [10]"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. [11]The Pharisee stood up and prayed about[a] himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. [12]I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' [13]But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' [14]I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luke 18:9-14)

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[282]D. A. Carson, *The Sermon on the Mount: An Evangelical Exposition of Matthew 5-7* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), 99.

[a] Or *to*

The context of the Sermon on the Mount deals with the so-called righteousness of the religious leaders. Jesus judges these leaders for outward show, and, at the same time, condemns them for their censorious judgment of others while their lifestyle demonstrates that God did not control their lives. Thus, Jesus issues His strong warning of judgment that is hypercritical, overcritical, stern, severe, and contemptuous. Today, Matthew 7:1 is frequently debased by many God-fearing followers of Jesus by entering into a spirit of censoriousness, that is to say, picking apart or pulling down any believer who does not reach an agreement with their particular brand of accepted beliefs.

On the other hand, this counsel of Jesus does not preclude us from making judgements on some occasions. For example, Jesus also speaks of "righteous judgments." He declares, "Stop judging by mere appearances, and make a right judgment" (John 7:24). Following His renunciation of judgment in Matthew 7:1, Jesus goes right to the heart of censorious judgment, "You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye" (7:5). Again, Jesus encourages the disciples to exercise caution against those who violate His teachings:

> Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. [16]By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? [17]Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. [18]A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. [19]Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. [20]Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. (7:15-20)

The admonition of Jesus in 7:1 is similar in construction to other passages in the Sermon on the Mount. Just a cursory reading of the Sermon on the Mount reveals that Jesus is addressing the leaders of Israel for their harsh judgment on others who did not measure up to their so-called righteousness, which consisted of external acts. Prior to His pronouncement about judging, we should carefully read Matthew 5 and 6 in order to catch the tone for what follows in Matthew 7:1. For instance, think about the following announcements of Jesus in its fuller context:

> Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. [2]So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. [3]But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, [4] so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (6:1-4)

> And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. [6]But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. [7]And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. [8] Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. (6:5-8)

> But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. (5:39)

> Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. (5:42)

All of these sayings from Jesus illustrate the characteristics of the men who were making judgments that Jesus addressed in Matthew 7:1. Does Jesus really mean that we must pray in our room and "close the door"? Does Jesus teach that we cannot defend ourselves if someone is trying to kill us or a family member? Does Jesus inform us that we are never to turn someone down if they wish to borrow from us? Does Jesus mean that we are never to exercise any kind of judgment? It is obvious that Jesus employs in His teaching what is known as hyperbole, that is, bold exaggeration for the sake of emphasis. Just what is Jesus teaching in Matthew 7:1? The context of 7:1 does not forbid all judgments. What does Jesus mean by His imperative?

The context of Jesus' statement does not forbid all judgment. Yet, in spite of context, many Christians ravage this Scripture in their dealings with other believers, which abuse disrupts the unity for which Jesus prayed (John 17). It is necessary that we apply correct principles of biblical interpretation in order that we do not misuse, breach, or nullify other plain teachings of Scripture. Consider, for example, the teachings of the Holy Spirit concerning judicious perception of that which is right or wrong:

> The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; [20]idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions [21]and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21)

Jesus is not condemning one's castigation of those involved in sinful acts. Both Jesus and Paul make judgments about behavior that fails to exemplify, or represent, God and Christ and the Holy Spirit. An excellent commentary on Matthew 7:1 is found in Chapters 14 and 15 of the Book of Romans. For instance, consider the following comments by Paul as he seeks to maintain the unity created by the Holy Spirit:

> Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. [2]One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. [3]The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. [4]Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. (Romans 14:1-4)

When we defy the principles set forth by Paul, we go astray from the plain teachings of Jesus in Matthew 7:1. Yet again, Paul goes once more to the very heart of the matter when he writes: "Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind" (14:5). This statement agrees with his earlier statement: "Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand" (Romans 14:4). Paul is echoing, in Romans 14:4, the teachings of Jesus in Matthew 7:1. Yet, many Christians continue to habitually go against the intended meaning of "Judge not" in order to maintain their narrow views of orthodoxy. It is plundered of its intended meaning by many well-meaning Christians in their zeal to be true to the Word of God. The most able and accomplished preachers have clashed in their explanations of Holy Scripture.

We should study Jesus' language with minute attention and study in the context of His phrase in order that we do not contravene plain teaching. Context often sets the tone for correct understanding. Justification for violation of Matthew 7:1 is based upon 7:6, 15. The following quote summarizes the problem we experience in our application of Scriptures quite well: "We perceive what is 'on our mind' and not always what is presented to us."[283] It is not uncommon for us to confuse our theoretical comprehension of God's Revelation with our interpretation.

OVERALL VIEW OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

Matthew Chapter 5

It is important in our exposition of this passage (Matthew 7:1) to consider the Sermon on the Mount as a whole before we attempt to exegete a particular view. First, Jesus sets forth the characteristics that exemplify His people (5:1-9). Following the beatitudes, Jesus informs His disciples about the mistreatment of those who follow Him (5:10-13). Next in order, He then makes known to them that they are "preservatives"—the glue or cement that holds society together, that is to say, "salt" and "light" (vv. 13-16). After that, Jesus calls attention to the necessity of not breaking the commandments of God (5:17-20). Soon afterward, Jesus calls attention to the true interpretation of the Law over against that of the religious leaders in the form of six antitheses (5: 21-

[283]John C. Condon, *Semantics and Communication* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1966), 17.

47). In this Sermon, we are taught how to behave in our walk with God and others. We are counseled that God's Law is relevant for every area of our lives, and we are informed as to what God demands of us in order to praise Him.

Matthew Chapter 6

Jesus continues His discussion of the acts of piety that honors God: [1] giving to the needy (6:1-4); [2] praying in sincerity (6:5-15); and [3] fasting as a means of enhancing one's own spiritual renewal (6:16-18). These performances of devotion were not simply to be external accomplishments, but internal transactions. God is concerned with the heart, not just outward acts. Whatever activity we perform, we must do this to God's glory. Jesus warns His disciples of the perils of simply doing deeds to be seen of men and women. Following this exposition of true piety, Jesus admonishes His children about the hazards of worldliness, that is, the jeopardy of living for the temporal possessions of life (6:19-34).

Matthew Chapter 7

In this chapter, Jesus concentrates on relationships. His disciples are all members of God's community. Therefore, His children should not sit in faultfinding, hypercritical, scrupulous, and fussy judgments (7:1-5). As stated above, even though Jesus issues an injunction against judging, nevertheless, this admonition, as cited above, is followed immediately by "Do not give dogs what is sacred; do not throw your pearls to pigs" (7:6) and "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves" (7:15). Hence, it is evident that "Do not judge" (7:1), in the first five verses of chapter 7, Jesus must have reference to judgment of His people other than discernment of those who have rejected the Gospel of God.

"Do not judge" (7:1), is <u>not</u> the same judgment that Jesus speaks of in verses 6 and 15. The judging in verses 6 and 15 deals with those who have spurned the ethical behavior that Jesus calls for and the rejection of the "Good News" of the Kingdom, that is, Jesus as God's way of salvation. The ones whom Jesus addresses in these verses (7:6, 15) are echoed in Romans 2:8: "But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger." Matthew 7:1 contemplates, not those who have repudiated God, but rather those who have acquiesced to the teachings of Jesus. Christians are not to judge their fellow believers in the sense of being censorious, faultfinding, hypercritical, or overcritical in their analysis of their spiritual welfare and of their relation to God and other Christians.

Many denominations frequently violate Matthew 7:1 by insisting that individuals conform to their particular brand of orthodoxy, or accepted beliefs. We violate Jesus' injunction against judging when we insist that one adhere to our particular understanding of God's Word. Fee and Stuart capture the problem that churches exhibit in their attitudes toward others who do not necessarily conform to their grasp, or discernment, of God's Word:

> Without necessarily intending to, we bring our theological heritage, our ecclesiastical traditions, our cultural norms, or our existential concerns to the Epistles as we read them. And this results in all kinds of selectivity or "getting around" certain texts.[284]

James our Lord's brother also reiterates this teaching of Jesus in his Epistle:

> Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. [12]There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor? (James 4:11-12)

To speak against a brother or sister is to scorn the Law of God. It is a violation of the "royal law" found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (2:8) because it is the supreme law that is the source and

[284]Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 58.

summation of all laws governing human relationships (Matthew 22:36-40; Romans 13:8-10). James, no doubt, had in mind the words of Jesus when he wrote:

> Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, [13]because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment! (James 2:12-13)

Paul captures the very heart of Jesus' warning in Matthew 7:1, when he discusses, as stated above, the "weak versus the strong" in his Epistle to the Romans (chapters 14 and 15). The spirit that Paul condemns—and Jesus condemns—is that feeling of superiority, that is to say, an outlook that we are all right while others are all wrong. It is that spirit or tendency to be sanctimonious — big "me" and little "you." There is a difference between meekness and arrogance. In meekness we are to deal with one's understanding of God's Word—maturity as well as immaturity. On the other hand, arrogance does not make allowances for one's imperfection in understanding. Haughtiness is the mentality that is willing to take a meat cleaver in order to hack one to death for an honest misunderstanding of the Sacred Writings. Jesus denounces censorious actions, but humility is sanctioned. It is in this vein that Paul exemplifies the commandment of Jesus ("Do not judge," Matthew 7:1) when he writes his instructions to the Romans:

> Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. [2]One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. [3]The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. [4]Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. (Romans 14:1-4)

Romans 14:1-4 is an excellent commentary on Matthew 7:1. Paul is confronting the issue of imperfection in knowledge head-on. This deformity in perception calls for toleration on the part of both parties. Within the Christian community, there are infants, there are children, there are young men and women, and there are old men and women. No one is at the same level of knowledge. None of God's children has 20/20 vision. God's people can no more all think alike than they can all look alike. God has never made absolute perfection in knowledge a condition of salvation, if so, no one could be saved—that includes you!

Since Matthew 7:6 and 7:15 are employed by many within the Churches of Christ as well as other denominations to set aside Jesus' instructions in 7:1, it is appropriate to refer to one of the founders of the Movement known as the Churches of Christ. Alexander Campbell understood the implications of Matthew 7:1, Romans 14 & 15, and James 2:12-13; 4:11-12). This Movement started out as a Reformation Movement, not a Restoration Movement.[285] This Restoration Movement originated out of a sectarian background among the Presbyterians. Thomas Campbell (1763-1854), father of Alexander Campbell (1788-1866), had been defrocked for offering the communion to other Presbyterians not of his orthodox party.

Thomas Campbell understood the biblical principles of making allowances for one another. He had captured the essence of "Do not judge." He had grasped the reality of Christian forbearance toward those who did not comprehend the teachings of the Bible as he did. When there were doctrinal differences, he exercised humility, leniency, and moderation toward those whom he knew to be in fellowship with God. In his *Declaration and Address (*1809), he went right to the moral fiber of attitudes that Christians should exercise toward another in dealing with differences within the Christian community. The following excerpts from the *Declaration and Address* express the "intent" of Matthew 7:1:

> **Proposition 6.** That although inferences and deductions from Scripture premises, when fairly inferred, may be truly called the doctrine of God's holy word, yet are they not formally binding upon the consciences of Christians farther than they perceive the connection, and evidently see that they are so; for their faith must not stand in the wisdom of men, but in

[285]The distinction between a Reformation Movement and a Restoration Movement is that one seeks to bring about reform within the body of Christ, whereas the other (Restoration) seeks to restore that which ceased to exist. Campbell sought to bring about unity within the various denominations. He maintained that the church needed reform. His movement degenerated into a Restoration Movement.

the power and veracity of God. Therefore, so such deduction can be made terms of communion, but do properly belong to the after and progressive edification of the Church. Hence, it is evident that no such deductions or inferential truths ought to have any place in the Church's confession.[286]

Proposition 7. That although doctrinal exhibitions of the great system of Divine truths, and defensive testimonies in opposition to prevailing errors, be highly expedient, and the more full and explicit they be for those purposes, the better; yet, as these must be in a great measure the effect of human reasoning, and of course must contain many inferential truths, they ought not to be made terms of Christian communion; unless we suppose, what is contrary to fact, that none have a right to the communion of the Church, but such as possess a very clear and decisive judgment, or are come to a very high degree of doctrinal information; where as the Church from the beginning did, and ever will, consist of little children and young men, as well as fathers.[287]

Proposition 8. It is not necessary that persons should have a particular knowledge of distinct apprehensions of all Divinely revealed truths in order to entitle them to a place in the Church.[288]

CONCLUSION

Matthew 7:1 does not mean the refusal to practice any discrimination between right and wrong or of pronouncing "right judgment" as taught by Jesus (John 7:24). The best way to illustrate this "judging" is to reflect upon the self-righteousness of the Pharisees. In this Sermon, so it appears, our Lord had the Pharisees' hypocritical judgment in mind. They had misinterpreted the Law. They were pretentious, boastful, braggarts in their giving to the needy, pompous in their prayers, and ostentatious in their fasting. They were object-oriented, earthly-minded, unspiritual, and greedy in their vision with regard to the material and spiritual things of this world. Pay attention, once more, to Jesus as He calls awareness to their external righteousness: "For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20).

A certain amount of repetition is necessary in order to help remove the underbrush of traditions that has hidden the true interpretation of Jesus' sayings to His disciples. Once more, the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9-14) is a bang-up commentary on Matthew 7:1. Jesus warns His disciples of this breed of behavior. May God help us to "Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:2-3). Jesus graphically depicts the kind of judging, as stated earlier in this Chapter, He prohibits in His Sermon on the Mount what He rebuked the religious leaders of in His Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector:

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable:
[10]"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. [11]The Pharisee stood up and prayed about[a] himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. [12]I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' [13]But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' [14]I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luke 18:9-14)

The next chapter (10) analyzes another abused text by many sincere and godly men and women. Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount, discusses the narrow and wide gates (Matthew 7:13-14). This Scripture is frequently taken out of context to uphold the narrow and sectarian attitudes of many Christians. Chapter 10 looks at the context in order to determine the meaning one should attach to this loosely cited text. Again, this citation from Jesus needs to be reviewed through new eyes. Unconsciously, Christians often crucify their intellect when it comes to reexamination of "pet" Scriptures. It is difficult for us to escape the bondage of our

[286]Thomas Campbell, *Declaration and Address* in C. A. Young, *Historical Documents Advocating Christian Union* (Joplin, Missouri, 1985), 110.

[287]Ibid., 110, 111.

[288]Ibid., 111.

[a] Or *to*

reigning orthodoxy. For many Christians, dogmatic certainty is the only way to meet their needs. This examination of Matthew 7:13-14 calls into question the theology of our forefathers. If we wish to escape the past, we must study the context in which the interpretation of a particular Scripture originated.

10

The Narrow Gate

> One benefits from the realization that everyone approaches the study of the Scriptures with his own set of complex circumstances and understandings. On one side are the personal factors or prejudices that affect the judgment of the interpreter. On the other side are the philosophical and theological assumptions or presuppositions that the interpreter shares with some others. Both play significant roles in the result of one's study. While some have attempted to approach the Scriptures strictly from a neutral stance, without presuppositions, the results have been disappointing. Instead of attempting to discard all influencing factors, one may take appropriate cautionary steps, as listed by Stanton: (a) the awareness of the danger of prejudices and presuppositions; (b) the use of historical-critical method; and (c) allowing one's own presuppositions to be modified or even remolded by the text itself. One will not interpret the text as much as the text will interpret him[289]

As a young preacher, I cited Jesus' words about the narrow and wide gates to uphold my narrow and restricted attitude. I called upon these two sayings (Matthew 7:13-14) to entice others to join my party—the company of believers that I erroneously identified as the "narrow gate." For one not to be in the band that I belonged to was equivalent to being in the all-embracing road to hell. For one not to be in my circle—one-cup and non-Sunday school—then, that person was on his or her way to the "underworld." Why? Well, they were on the "spacious" road—the road that leads to eternal damnation. Scores of devout Christians still hold to this erroneous view of Matthew 7:13-14. This illegal use of this saying of Jesus is not a willful rejection of the true teachings of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount by its adherents, but rather it is simply an honest mistake of the intellect.

Unfortunately, this Scripture is still relied upon by numberless sincere believers within the various divisions within the Stone/Campbell Movement to try to get people in line with the traditions of a select few. This citation of Scripture is often alluded to by many well-meaning Christians to browbeat those who do not adjust into conformity to their eccentric fellowship. If one does not adhere to certain doctrinal understandings of a distinctive "interpretive community," then that person is not in the "narrow way" according to certain segments of the Stone/Campbell Restoration Movement.

Countless Christians still repeat this phrase ("narrow gate") to denounce those who do not concur with their critical views about individual communion cups, Bible study classes, instrumental music in the Sunday morning worship, solos, hand-clapping in the assembly, women teachers, Bible colleges, and so on. Innumerable individuals conclude that every human being that strays from toeing the party line is on the "broad road" that leads to death. Today, there are over two-dozen splinter groups that lay claim to the "narrow road." One assembly of believers is not willing to express fellowship with another association of unwavering saints. To one crowd the limited way is their restricted reading of certain Scriptures. To another fellowship the *thin channel* is their exposition of Holy Scripture. This chapter will analyze the "orthodox way" in the light of the

[289]Ted Carruth, "The Implication of Proper Principles of Biblical Interpretation for Christian Unity", in F. Furman Kearley, Edward P. Myers, and Timothy D. Hadley, editors, *Biblical Interpretation Principles and Practice: Studies in Honor of Jack Pearl Lewis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), 53.

whole of the Sermon on the Mount. Just what does our Lord have reference to when he mentions the "narrow way"?[290]

THE NARROW ROAD VERSUS THE BROAD ROAD

We must choose to follow the commandments of God or the commandments of men. One way is easy, the other way is hard. The boundaries are clearly distinguished. One gate leads to destruction, the other gate leads to eternal life. Revealed truths compel obedience to God's way. To enter the "narrow gate," we must leave "self" behind. On the other hand, to enter the "roomy way," there is no limit to the baggage—self-righteousness, pride, hatred, envy, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, discord, and so on. The "narrow gate" is the very opposite of these works of the flesh.

The objective of our Lord in this "Sermon on the Mount" is to bring people to an understanding of their nature, their character, and their practice of the two great commandments—love for God and love for one another (22:34-40). We must realize that kingdom behavior is set forth in the beatitudes (5:3-12). This kind of conduct is the narrow road and the narrow gate that Jesus addresses in His Sermon—not individual cups, Sunday school, solos, handclapping, instrumental music, and so on.[291] The realm of the New Jerusalem is a dominion of light. This kingdom consists of those who allow their good works to be seen by men in order that God may be praised (5:14).

Jesus speaks of ethical behavior that is in harmony with the will of God as that which God desires in His children. It is an inward righteousness that God is delighted in, not external righteousness. Following the beatitudes, Jesus addresses the praiseworthy performance that is pleasing to the Father and the unworthy conduct that is not acceptable to the Father. He explains that the quality of one's actions that pleases God is practice that is in harmony with the intent of God's Law:

> Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. [18] I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. [19] Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. [20] For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. (5:17-20)

Paul also addresses kingdom conduct in his Epistle to the Galatians. To begin with, he tells the Galatians that a certain course of action will prevent their entering the kingdom of heaven:

> The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; [20]idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions [21]and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21)

These works of the flesh will prevent us from inheriting God's kingdom. This kind of behavior is not kingdom behavior. Rather, it is the "broad road" that leads to eternal damnation. When we compare kingdom behavior with worldly behavior, we are reminded of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in which He calls for radical reformation in our lifestyle. Paul, too, paints a picture of the "broad road" in 5:19-21. Following this catalogue of negative behavior, he then enumerates "good works" that are representative of the "narrow road":

> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23]gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. [24]Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions

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[290]Those who advance this skewed, or distorted, interpretation are not dishonest or deceitful in their views; they are simply misguided from years of listening to preachers and teachers who, too, were taught incorrectly. One objective of this chapter is to help Christians learn how to read the Word of God more accurately, that is to say, in context.

[291]Many believers assume that the "narrow gate" is associated with individual communion cups, Sunday school, solos, handclapping, instrumental music, and so on. Yet, the context does not uphold such a view.

and desires. [25]Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. [26]Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. (5:22-26)

Again, Paul stresses the nature of the kingdom in the Book of Romans. Paul goes right to the heart of the "narrow way": "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men" (Romans 14:17-18). The Kingdom of heaven's righteousness is not to be confused with the darkness of Satan's kingdom (the broad road). We are now, in the words of Paul, "set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness" (6:18).

Beginning with Matthew 5:21 and going through 5:48, we discover that Jesus again sets forth the distinctive characteristics that are representative of the righteousness that is and is not pleasing to God. "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago" [**Ἠκούσατε ὅτι ἐρρέθη τοῖς ἀρχαίοις**, *Ēkousate hoti errethē tois archaiois*, "You heard that it was said to the ancients"] (5:21) stands for the "broad road," on the other hand, "But I tell you" [**ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν**, *egō de legō hymin*, "but I tell you"] (5:22) characterizes the "narrow road" that Jesus addresses toward the end of His Sermon (7:13-14). We detect the "broad road" in "You heard that it was said to the ancients."

The "broad road" is composed of people who perform their "acts of righteousness" to be seen of men (Matthew 6:1). The "broad road" is about human beings who pray to be "seen by men" (6:5). The "broad road" consists of individuals who fast to "show men they are fasting" (6:16). On the other hand, the "narrow road" embodies men and women who give to be seen by God, who pray to be seen by God, and who fast to be seen by God. The "narrow road" and "narrow gate" involve individuals who are bankrupt in spirit (5:3). It includes people who mourn because of their sins (5:4). It contains human beings who are meek as a result of their bankruptness and mourning (5:4). It encompasses those who hunger and thirst after the righteousness that is inward—a righteousness that glorifies God (5:6). It embraces one who is merciful (5:7); and it encloses one who is pure in heart (5:8).

This "narrow way" had nothing to do with the many peripheral issues that divide so many Christians within the Stone/Campbell Restoration Movement and other denominations. This "narrow way" had nothing to do with absolute perfection in knowledge. Jesus' "narrow way" had nothing to do with the performance of "five-acts" of worship on Sunday morning. For example, the believers in Rome and Corinth did not possess flawlessness in their comprehension of God's written Revelation; nevertheless, they were still in the "narrow way" as a result of abiding by the principles set forth in the Sermon on the Mount. There were doctrinal differences within the early community of God, but, nonetheless, they were still exhorted to follow Jesus, so that with one mouth and heart they could glorify God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 15:5). The beatitudes describe what the "narrow road" and the "narrow gate" is all about—holiness in one's life (Matthew 5:3-20).

In our Lord's Prayer (6:9-14), Jesus taught His disciples to pray: "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors." Again, He says, "For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you" (6:12, 14). Forgiveness is a part of the "narrow road." As stated above, Jesus begins this Sermon by expounding upon the characteristics that must be manifest in the life of every follower of Christ. It is imperative that we be "poor in spirit" (5:3), that is to say, we must not be self-righteous.

Following this Sermon, on another occasion, Jesus had the opportunity to illustrate this aspect of His Sermon on humility with the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14). In this parable, Jesus illustrates the sanctimonious spirit of the Pharisee. This holier-than-thou kind of spirit leads to destruction—it is the "broad way." Our attitude should be like the attitude that Paul expresses in his Galatian letter: "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted" (Galatians 6:1).

In order to stress the true meaning of the "narrow road," it is necessary to exercise repetition in the retelling of some of the beatitudes. Once more, the second beatitude—"Blessed are those who mourn" (Matthew 5:4)—describes the feelings of an individual that is poverty-stricken in spirit. We ache over our sins. And, as a result of our destitution, this brooding will display a make-up of unpretentiousness (5:5). We will not

pray, "God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get" (Luke 18:11). This self-righteousness is the "broad road" that leads to destruction.

If we are bankrupt in spirit, if we are mourning because of our sins, then we will be meek and we will unremittingly long for goodness. We will yearn for virtues that belong to God. Jesus says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (Matthew 5:6). This specific beatitude blesses not only the deed but also the dream that never comes true. Yet, in spite of all our failures, we still strive toward faultlessness. Our Lord expresses it this way: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (5:48). We must mirror God in all our actions.

We are the "salt" and "light" of the world (5:13-16). Our morality must exceed that of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law. "For I tell you," says Jesus, "that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven" (5:20). Remember that the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees' righteousness lay in externals (to be seen by men), not inward (to be seen by God). The righteousness of the religious leaders embodies the "broad way," not the "narrow way."

As stated above, Jesus now proceeds to show His disciples that His followers must put into practice the righteousness of God, which righteousness deals with ethical conduct. He demonstrates this kind of righteousness by giving detailed instructions concerning murder (5:21-26), adultery (5:27-30), divorce (5:31-32), oaths (5:33-37), an eye for an eye (5:38-42), love for one's enemies (5:43-48), giving to the needy (6:1-4), praying (6:5-15), fasting (6:16-18), laying up treasures (6:19-24), worrying (6:25-34), and judging others (7:1-6). In this Sermon, Jesus approaches the believer's whole disposition toward others. He lays down the kind of ethical behavior that constitutes the course of action that is representative of the "narrow way"—performance that God is pleased with.

Jesus says, in effect, that good behavior is kingdom behavior. This kind of ethical behavior is the "narrow road" and the "narrow gate." Jesus now comes to exhortation and to application. He warns that it is not praise, as such, from our lips that will enable us to enter the kingdom of heaven, but rather the practice of conduct set forth in His Sermon. This Sermon is functional. It is meant to be lived. It is something that everyone is to achieve and execute. Paul throughout his epistles stresses this kind of behavior. We only have to reflect upon the writings of Paul to the Ephesians (Chapters 4 and 5) to capture the essence of Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount:

> Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love (4:2); Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace (4:3); Each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor (4:25); Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen (4:29); Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you (4:32); Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God (5:1-2); But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people (5:3); Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving (5:4); For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God (Ephesians 5:5).

CONCLUSION

The Christian message is not some ideological theory, but something that is to be lived. The "narrow road" and "narrow gate" have to do with our everyday living—our relationship to God and to one another. It is works of the Spirit versus works of the flesh. Paul, no doubt, echoed the thoughts of our Lord Jesus when he expresses himself to the Galatians: "So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature" (Galatians 5:16). **If we are to interpret the Sermon on the Mount correctly, we must not isolate a Scripture from its context.** The immediate context clarifies Jesus' summary statement of His Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew 7:13-14. Jesus gives His commentary on these verses in the very beginning of His Sermon (5:1-16.)

The religious leaders failed in this kind of ethical behavior demanded by God. Just as John the Baptist confronted the religious leaders concerning their ethical and religious behavior (3:7-12), so Jesus also confronted these same religious leaders. After setting forth the "narrow way," He then warned His disciples about these leaders. Listen, once more, to Christ's penetrating words:

> Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. [18]I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. [19]Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. [20]For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. (5:17-20)

Beginning with 5:21 through 7:12, Jesus describes two ways—the bad and the good. Jesus discusses "murder" (5:21-26), "adultery" (5:27-30), "divorce" (5:31-31), "oaths" (5:33-37), "an eye for an eye" (5:38-42), "love for enemies" (5:43-48), "giving to the needy" (6:1-4), "prayer" (6:5-15), "fasting" (6:16-18), "treasures in heaven" (6:19-24), "worry" (6:25-34), "judging others" (7:1-6), and "asking, seeking, and knocking" (7:7-12). Jesus' comments on these subjects explain His comments in 7:13-14—the narrow and wide gates. This text is an old text that needs to be reexamined through new eyes.

Chapter 11 sets forth another old text that needs to be reevaluated through new eyes. Second John 9 is another Scripture that Christians frequently take out of context in order to maintain justification for ostracism of those who do not conform to their particular party line. The phrase "doctrine of Christ" (**διδαχῆ τοῦ Χριστοῦ**, *didachē tou Christou*) is frequently identified as the "teachings of Christ," not the teaching **about** Christ having come in the flesh. The expression "doctrine of Christ" could be subjective genitive (noun in the genitive [Christ] produces the action) or objective genitive (noun in the genitive [Christ] receives the action). How do we determine which is which? The answer is found in the context. Our proper application of this passage should assist us in maintaining the unity for which our Lord Jesus prayed (John 17).

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Doctrine of Christ:
2 John 9

> The main concern in the right use of the Word of God is its proper interpretation. Whether preaching is textual or topical or expository it rests ultimately upon the minister's interpretation of the Word of God. That theological discipline which takes as its goal the proper interpretation of Scripture is hermeneutics. A solid hermeneutics is the root of all good exegesis and exegesis is the foundation of all truly Biblical preaching. Therefore a sound hermeneutics is an absolute *desideratum* for the minister of the Word of God.[292]

What did John mean by the "teaching of Christ" (2 John 9, NIV) in this short letter "to the chosen lady and her children" (v. 1)? Second John 9 is called forth to justify separation from other Christians who do not always agree with another group of Christians on certain doctrinal issues. Unfortunately, the "teaching of Christ" ("doctrine of Christ," KJV) is used by many Christians to fracture the body of Christ. Within many fellowships, the "doctrine of Christ" includes whatever the particular fellowship espouses. Just what does the "doctrine of Christ" mean? Does the "teaching of Christ" in 2 John 9 condemn instrumental music in the so-called corporate worship service? Does this verse denounce the use of a plurality of cups in the distribution of the fruit of the vine in the observance of the Lord's Supper? Do we break the rules found in 2 John 9 for participation in teaching children on Sunday in a Sunday school classroom? Do we transgress 2 John 9 if we use wine instead of grape juice in the communion? Do we overstep 2 John 9 if we "break" the bread instead of "pinching" the bread? If we practice "hand clapping" in the assembly, do we violate the "teaching of Christ" in 2 John 9? Can we sing a "solo" in the congregation and not disobey the "teaching of Christ" in 2 John 9? These are questions that need answering!

Almost every split (approximately twenty-five) within the Stone/Campbell Movement[293] cites this particular Scripture to uphold their doctrinal purity and to justify their separation from other believers who do not always see "eye-to-eye" with the so-called infallible interpreters.[294] If we do not condemn instrumental

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[292]Bernard L. Ramm (1916-1992), "Biblical Interpretation," in Bernard L. Ramm, editor, *Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 5, 6.

[293]For an objective story of the Stone/Campbell Movement, see Leroy Garrett, *The Stone-Campbell Movement: An Anecdotal History of the Three Churches* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press Publishing Company, 1981).

[294]For a classic example of this mindset, see Ray Dutton, "To: The Elders of the Landmark church of Christ" in *Seibles Road Church of Christ (November 3, 1996): 1-3, where,* in his condemnation of Buddy Bell, pulpit minister for the Landmark Church of Christ in Montgomery, AL, he says (p. 3)*:*

> The apostle John told us exactly how we are to handle false teachers who come to us with their apostasies: *Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.* (2 Jn. 9-11).

music in the so-called worship assembly, then, 2 John 9 is cited to justify the "meat cleaver" action against any who would dare disagree with the splinter group cry. If we seek to have fellowship with those who employ instrumental music in their worship service, then, 2 John 9 is applied,[295] even though they themselves may not use the instrument.

Since there is much controversy over the phrase "doctrine of Christ" (**διδαχῆ τοῦ Χριστοῦ**, *didachē tou Christou*) in John's Second Epistle, it is incumbent upon all Christians to seek to ascertain the meaning employed by the author. Just what did John mean by this particular expression? The purpose of this chapter is to discover the intent of the writer in order that we might unite rather than divide over so many trivial positions. To arrive at a correct understanding of how John utilizes this phrase, it is necessary to examine the Greek genitive (Christ).

Should we interpret "doctrine of Christ" as the "**teaching <u>of Christ</u>**" (subjective genitive— **διδαχῆ τοῦ Χριστοῦ**) or "teaching **<u>about Christ</u>**" (objective genitive— **διδαχῆ τοῦ Χριστοῦ).** The context will have to decide! The immediate surroundings generally serve to exhibit the writer's own definition. The subjective genitive is the most widely advanced belief among the Churches of Christ as well as other denominations. Each division within the Churches of Christ claims this particular Scripture (2 John 9) as its own. It just so happens, according to each faction, that the "doctrine of Christ" represents one's own brand of orthodoxy. To disagree with a particular fellowship is tantamount to not abiding in the "doctrine of Christ."

SUBJECTIVE GENITIVE

Imperfection in knowledge

It is imperative that we understand "doctrine of Christ" (**διδαχῆ τοῦ Χριστοῦ**, *didachē tou Christou*) [KJV] in 2 John 9 in order to promote unity for which Christ prayed (John 17). First, if we interpret "doctrine of Christ" as the teachings of Jesus concerning a worship service (subjective genitive—**διδαχῆ τοῦ Χριστοῦ,** *didachē tou Christou*), which is the common interpretation of 2 John 9, then for one to disagree with the status quo of a particular group is in essence to disagree with the "doctrine of Christ." This point of view equates our own particular interpretation of the Scriptures concerning church organization and the so-called social worship service as on equal footing with the Word of God itself.[296] When this happens, then, this mishandling of the Word leads to some exegetical problems. For example, no one has flawless knowledge of God's written Revelation. Paul deals with this "know-it-all" attitude in the Corinthian letter. Christians, according to Paul, can be mistaken about some doctrinal issues and still abide in the "doctrine of Christ." Imperfection in knowledge, "in-and-of-itself," does not mean that we are not abiding in the "doctrine of Christ."

On page 3, of this same article, he writes: "When I asked Buddy if he believed solos, choirs, and quartets were scriptural in worship, he did not even hesitate with his answer. He told me in no uncertain terms that he believed that the practice of using solos, choirs, and quartets was in his words. 'very scriptural.'"

[295]See **C. A. Smith**, "Special Music" in *Old Paths Advocate* LXVV, no. 3 (March 1996): 4-5, where he writes:

> Unless someone shows me I am wrong. I cannot bid "God speed" to such for I would be guilty of endorsing that which I believe is a dangerous practice. (2 John 9-11), and that would make me a partaker in their evil deeds. As I have heard brother **Lynwood Smith** [1924-2007] say, several times: "I am Church of Christ to the core, and I hope that it shows in every area of my walk for the Lord." Nobody likes good singing better than I do, but let us please respect God's Word, the church, our brethren and ourselves and use it to glorify and praise God.

[296]Within the Churches of Christ, generally, the "doctrine of Christ" centers on one's concept of the "five acts" of worship. In other words, five rituals performed in a precise manner are imperative for us to abide in the "doctrine of Christ." If we employ instrumental music in worship, then we are not abiding in the "doctrine of Christ." If we employ Sunday school in the teaching of children and adults, then we are not abiding in the "doctrine of Christ." If we utilize individual cups in the communion, then we are not abiding in the "doctrine of Christ." If we take money out of the church treasure to assist individuals who are not Christians, then we are not abiding in the "doctrine of Christ." The list is almost without measure.

Listen to the words of Paul as he sets forth this concept of imperfection in knowledge: "We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God" (1 Corinthians 8:1-3). Did we catch this phrase? "The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know"? What does this Scripture mean? Is Paul advancing the concept that "blemish" in knowledge is tantamount to damnation? Is he advancing the notion that "deformity" in knowledge is the same as not abiding in the "doctrine of Christ"?

How do we reconcile the following statement of Paul (Romans 14:1) to the common (subjective genitive) interpretation of 2 John 9? We would do well to listen to Paul as he discusses toleration for the weak in understanding: "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters" (Romans 14:1). Is this spirit of toleration the same attitude that we practice in dealing with differences within the Christian community? Do we advance the same spirit of mercifulness for imperfection in knowledge that Paul admonished the Romans to adhere to? Again, we should give careful attention to the Holy Spirit's words: "Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind" (Romans 14:5). Do we read this as, "Each one should be fully convinced according to my own mind"? Have we substituted "my" for "theirs"?

Holiness of Life

A second alternative[297] to the "doctrine of Christ" (subjective genitive) is the *teachings* of Jesus Messiah to His disciples. For example, the Sermon on the Mount is an illustration of the teachings of Jesus.[298] Yet, this understanding of the phrase cannot be understood in an absolute sense. For instance, how many Christians abide in the "teachings of Christ" in an absolute sense? The wording of 2 John 9 does not allow for departure: "Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God." Yet, John clearly states that no man is without sin: "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8).

There are **no mitigating circumstances** for John. Anyone who does not abide in the "doctrine of Christ" does not have God. Surely John is not writing about sinless perfection in one's life. John, earlier, had rebuked individuals who maintained that they had no sin (1 John 1:10). God forbid that any Christian should be guilty of the sin of "perfectionism." None of us has perfect knowledge. None of us lives a perfect life. We are all striving unto perfection in both zones.

Subjective Genitive: Noun in the Genitive Produces the Action

What is meant by subjective genitive? The subjective genitive occurs when the noun in the genitive[299] produces the action. To illustrate this principle, it is helpful to review another well-known passage in the Pauline corpus: "If we are out of our mind, it is for the sake of God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For Christ's love (**ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ**, *agapē tou Christou*) compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died" (2 Corinthians 5:13-14). The context clearly indicates that the noun in the

[297]This second alternative is not under consideration from the context—even though John addresses ethical behavior in this Second Epistle. The context for "doctrine of Christ" appears to have reference to the confession that Jesus had come in the flesh.

[298] John addresses the teachings of Jesus in his Gospel and his Book of Revelation, as well as his Epistles. No one denies that one can be in fellowship with God and, at the same time, flagrantly flaunt the teachings of Christ in his or her daily life. See 2 John 4-6 in which he deals with loving one another as Jesus commanded. See also 1 John 2: 3-6. "Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did," writes John (v. 6). It is worthy of notice that even the scholars that advance the subjective genitive, still do not advance the notion of absolute perfection in holiness, on the part of men and women, as prerequisite to fellowship with God. When they speak of subjective genitive, their writings indicate that they have in mind the teachings of Jesus as found in the Sermon on the Mount, not rules and regulations to govern five acts to be performed on Sunday morning.

[299]For an explanation of "case" in Greek, see Ray Summers, *Essentials of New Testament Greek* (Nashville: Broadman, 1950), 16-18.

genitive (Christ, Χριστοῦ) means the love that Christ has for us, not our love for Christ. The context shows that the phrase (Christ's love) refers to the love which Christ has for us. That is to say, Jesus is the one doing the loving. The noun (Christ—Χριστοῦ) in the genitive produced the action. It is not the case that determines the point, but the context.

One more illustration is in order to clearly demonstrate the use of the subjective genitive. Paul employs the subjective genitive when he writes about Jesus' preaching: "Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ" (**ὁ κήρυγμα Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ**, *ho kērygma Iēsou Christou*) [Romans 16:25]. Jesus **produced** the preaching. In other words, the preaching was not **about** (objective genitive) Jesus, but rather the proclamation of the Good News **by** Jesus Messiah (**Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ**, *Iēsou Christou*) Himself.[300]

Objective Genitive:
Noun in the Genitive Receives the Action

What is meant by the objective genitive? The objective genitive receives the action of the noun. The subjective genitive produces the action of the noun. An example of the *objective genitive* is found in Jesus' rebuke of the religious authorities: "I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit (**πνεύματος βλασφημία**, *pneumatos blasphēmia*) will not be forgiven" (Matthew 12:31).[301] The noun "Spirit" did not produce (subjective) the action ("blasphemy") against Himself, but rather He received (objective) the action. Again, it is the context that determines the meaning, not the case in-and-of-itself. The noun **πνεύματος** *(pneumatos*) is spelled the same in Greek. It is only the context that determines whether the noun in the "genitive" is *subjective* or *objective.*

As stated above, many sincere Christians rely upon 2 John 9 to justify their disconnection from other believers on the basis that they are not continuing in the "doctrine of Christ" ("teaching of Christ, " NIV). But many sincere Christians have not weighed the context very carefully to determine whether the noun in the genitive **produced** the action or **received** the action. In other words, did the genitive (Christ, **Χριστοῦ**, *Christou*) produce the action (teaching produced by Christ), or is the genitive the receiver of the action (teaching about Christ having come in the flesh)?

In seeking a correct answer to the problem of interpretation in 2 John 9, it is necessary to draw attention to the fact that no person has a right to foist into his or her expositions of Scripture one's own dogmatic speculations, or the interpretation of others, and then insist that these conclusions are an essential part of divine Revelation. Many Christians misapply this Scripture to uphold their sectarian attitude (not deliberately in my judgment) toward those who do not conform to their particular brand of orthodoxy concerning a so-called worship service.[302] If we approach the Scriptures with our own pre-conceived impressions and are anxious to put our own sense upon the text that coincides with our own sentiments rather than the thoughts of the author, then we will never be able to arrive at a correct understanding of the passage in question.

SCHOLARSHIP: OBJECTIVE GENITIVE

There are many eminent scholars who understand the genitive "of Christ" (**Χριστοῦ**, *Christou*) in 2 John 9 as *objective genitive* (receives the action), not *subjective genitive* (produces the action). Thus the phrase, as

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[300]See Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1927), 78.

[301] Ibid.

[302]I do not think this misuse of 2 John 9 is deliberate on the part of those men and women seeking to be true to the Word of God. In spite of their sincerity, it is necessary to draw attention again to the fact that the whole system of God's Revelation must be explained so as to be consistent with itself. In order to ascertain the meaning that is attached to any word or phrase, we must examine the context. The word "context" is from Latin, which means to "weave together" and is applied to written documents. The context is the connection of thought that runs through every passage, which constitutes for itself a whole. The immediate context is that which immediately precedes or follows a given word, phrase, or sentence. Not only must the context be considered, but one must also investigate the scope and plan of the author.

interpreted by many scholars, means "doctrine about the person of Christ" (**objective genitive**) rather than the "teachings of Christ" (subjective genitive). The following commentaries illustrate the ***objective genitive*** in their interpretation of the context of 2 John 9:

Rudolph Bultmann

Rudolph Bultmann (1884-1976), who was Professor of New Testament and Early History of the University of Marburg, wrote:

> **Τοῦ Χριστοῦ** [*Tou Christou*, "of Christ"] may be taken as a subjective genitive; it is more probable, however, that "of Christ" is an objective genitive, since the author hangs everything on his Christology, i.e., on the doctrine about Christ, as v. 7 shows. Judgment is passed on the disciple of the heretical doctrine by the phrase, **θεὸν οὐκ ἔχει** [*theon ouk echei*, "does not have God"]; this corresponds to 1 Jn 2:23, where it is said of "the one denying the Son," **οὐδὲ τὸν πατέρα ἔχει** [*oude ton patera echei* , "he does not have the Father"]. That means: he stands outside the fellowship of God.[303]

David Smith

Dr. David Smith's comments on this verse (2 John 9) also capture the very heart of John's concern over Gnostic rejection of Jesus having come in the flesh:

> **Τῇ διδαχῇ τοῦ Χριστοῦ** [***Tē didachē tou Christou***, "doctrine of Christ"]. The teaching which recognizes Jesus as the Christ (1 Jn. 4:1-2), i. e., the Messiah, the Savior.[304]

Kenneth Wuest

Also, Kenneth S. Wuest (1893-1962), instructor in New Testament Greek at Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, expresses his agreement with David Smith:

> "Doctrine" is *didachē*, "teaching," namely, that which is taught. Smith says that it is the teaching which recognizes Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, the Savior. We have a genitive of reference, "teaching with reference to Christ. . . ." The person therefore, who goes beyond the teaching of the incarnation of the Son in human flesh, thus denying the incarnation does not possess God in a saving relationship.[305]

Leon Morris

Leon Morris (1914-2006), Principal of Ridley College, Melbourne, and Canon of St. Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne, paraphrases:

> So if a man does not bring this doctrine (i.e., the doctrine that Christ is God incarnate) he is not to be received.[306]

George Johnston

Another scholarly witness in favor of the *objective genitive* is George Johnston, Principal of United Theological College and Professor of New Testament Studies at McGill Univ., Montreal. He, too, leaves no

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[303]Rudolph Bultmann, *A Commentary on the Johannine Epistles, Hermeneia Series* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 113.

[304]David Smith, "The Epistles of John," in *The Expositor's Greek New Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 202.

[305]Kenneth S. Wuest, *In These Last Days: Studies in the Greek Text of II Peter, I, II, III John and Jude***,** Wuest's Word Studies Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 206.

[306]Leon Morris, "2 John," in *The New Bible Commentary: Revised*, ed. D. Guthrie and J. A. Motyer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 1272.

doubt that the "doctrine of Christ" must refer to the incarnation. Johnson calls attention to 2 John 7 as commentary on 2 John 9. He concludes from the context that "doctrine of Christ" must be objective genitive. We should pay attention to his brief comments:

> The doctrine of Christ" must refer to the point in dispute at 7 [verse] and in 1 John; so the genitive is objective.[307]

Lehman Strauss

Lehman Strauss (1911-1986) also interprets 2 John 9 as *objective genitive*:

> Twice in this one verse we read the phrase "the doctrine of Christ." The word *doctrine* (Greek, *didachē*) means "teaching." John is not referring here merely to those doctrines which Christ taught, but rather teaching with reference to Christ, teaching which recognizes Jesus as the Messiah and Saviour. . . . In view here [2 John 10-11] are the false teachers who come with false teachings. They do not believe nor teach the true doctrine, namely, that Christ is God manifest in flesh. These teachers are not Christians at all. They are not true witnesses of Jehovah; they are actually the devil's witnesses.[308]

Donald Burdick

Donald Burdick (b.1917), in keeping with his comments on 1 John 2: 24, explains:

> John contrasts the one who goes beyond and the one who remains "in the doctrine of Christ" in verse 9. This doctrine is not teaching which comes from Christ; instead it is the teaching concerning Christ's incarnation which John has already pointed out in verse 7.[309]

E. M. Blaiklock

In concluding the *objective genitive* scholarship, one more scholar is in order to again set forth the context of 2 John 9. Edward Musgrave Blaiklock (1903-1983) is perfectly correct, as it appears from the context, when he says:

> A Jesus any less than God in flesh appearing cannot be a Saviour. Any doctrine which takes away from Christ's full deity is no doctrine at all. It is antichristian, destructive, ruinous. . . . The "teaching of Christ" is the teaching which stresses the fact that Christ was God's revelation of Himself, the full and final message to man. Any other version of Christ, any distortion of the record, loses not only the Christ John had known but loses God too. Christ was the way to the Father. Lose one and the other is lost. Such warning is timeless.[310]

Even though several eminent scholars have been quoted here, it should be remarked that a nose count is not really worth anything except to illustrate the popularity or respectability of a view. Often one author accepts a plausible-sounding view presented by others without really making a meticulous study of the matter. No one person has the opportunity to study every issue with complete thoroughness. Ultimately, only the context matters, not what various people think. In fairness to those who espouse the *subjective genitive* (teachings of Christ), it is necessary to also cite scholars of equal scholarship that postulate that the *doctrine of Christ* is the teaching by Christ (subjective), not the teaching about Christ (objective).

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[307]G. Johnson, "I, II, III John," in Matthew Black and H. H. Rowley, ed., *Peake's Commentary on the Bible* (London and Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1967), 1039.

[308]Lehman Strauss, *The Epistles of John* (Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1972), 153, 154.

[309]Donald W. Burdick, *The Epistles of John* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1970), 107.

[310]E. M. Blaiklock, *Letters to Children of Light: Commentary on First, Second & Third John* (Glendale, California: Regal Books, 1975), 117, 118.

SCHOLARSHIP: SUBJECTIVE GENITIVE

John R. W. Stott

The *subjective genitive* concept is fully worked out by John Stott (1921-2011) in his excellent commentary on the Epistles of John. He disagrees with Smith, as cited above, that the genitive should be interpreted as *objective genitive* and not as a *subjective genitive*:

> At first sight this phrase, literally 'doctrine of the Christ' (NEB), might be taken as meaning 'the teaching which recognizes Jesus as the Christ' (Smith), and this would suit the context well. But the 'usage of the N. T.' (Westcott, Brooke) requires that the genitive be interpreted not as objective, 'the teaching about Christ', but as subjective, 'Christ's teaching'. This no doubt includes what Christ continued to teach through the apostles (cf. Acts i. 1; Col. Iii. 16; Heb. Ii. 3). Such authoritative apostolic doctrine is equivalent to what in his First Epistle John called 'what you heard from the beginning' (ii. 24, RSV; cf. Ii. 7, iii. 11; Jn. Viii. 31; 2 Tim. Iii. 14 and 2 Jn. 5, 6).[311]

Kenneth Grayston

Kenneth Grayston (1914-2005), Methodist preacher and New Testament scholar, objects to the *objective genitive* in his commentary on the Johannine epistles:

> The misleading views of the **deceivers** had little to do with Docetism: their refusal, as the elder makes plain, consisted of abandoning the teaching of Christ (*didachē tou Christou*). RSV and NEB, but not GNB, JB, and NIV, translate didach by **doctrine**, which in modern usage inevitably suggest a formulated Christology and implies an objective genitive (teaching about Christ). But the genitive could equally be subjective (teaching given by Christ), referring to Christ's teaching about love both by his words and his actions.[312]

A. T. Robertson

Archibald Thomas Robertson (1863-1934), the greatest Greek scholar in America, also advances the idea that the "doctrine of Christ" (subjective) is the teaching that Christ taught:

> Not the teaching about Christ, but that of Christ which is the standard of Christian teaching as the walk of Christ is the standard for the Christian's walk (I John 2:6).[313]

Marvin R. Vincent

Marvin Richardson Vincent (1834-1922), also a reputable scholar, postulates the "doctrine of Christ" as *subjective genitive:*

> Not the teaching *concerning* Christ, but the teaching of Christ Himself and of His apostles. See Heb. Ii. 3. So according to New Testament usage. See John xviii. 19; Acts ii. 12; Apoc. Ii. 14, 15.[314]

CHURCHES OF CHRIST: SUBJECTIVE GENITIVE

Many within the Churches of Christ apply a very unique interpretation to 2 John 9. Generally, the "doctrine of Christ" is associated with a particular brand of orthodoxy. Almost all major divisions within the

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[311]John R. W. Stott, *The Epistles of John: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 212.

[312]Kenneth Grayston, *The Johannine Epistles*, The New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 154.

[313]A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament: General Epistles and Revelation of John*, vol., 6 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1933), 254.

[314]Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol., 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 396.

Churches of Christ cite this verse as their verse. To some Christians, the "doctrine of Christ" is associated with one-cup, non-Sunday school, instrumental music, divorce and remarriage, wine, grape juice, bread breaking, bread pinching, orphan homes, Bible colleges, and so on. Seldom do the journals (Churches of Christ) on 2 John 9 ever refer to the "doctrine of Christ" as "loving one another" or adhering to the teachings of Christ as expounded in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7).[315] A few citations from some of the Church of Christ journals or lectureships should illustrate this illegal utilization of 2 John 9. To illustrate, it is necessary to cite a few examples of godly men to set forth the presupposition.

J. Noel Meredith

In The Sixth Annual Denton Lectures (November 8-12, 1987), Noel Meredith delivered a lecture on "False Teachers and How to Deal with Them (2 John 7-13)." In this lecture he identifies, among other things, the employment of instrumental music in the so-called assembly as tantamount to not abiding in the "doctrine of Christ." He writes,

> The kind of sin under consideration (verse 9) here is one in which one is progressing beyond the doctrine of Christ; he does not abide in the doctrine of Christ. When division arose in the church over the use of instrumental music in worship, those who used it styled themselves as "progressives" and they stigmatized those who adhered to the original mode of worship—singing God's praise unaccompanied (Eph. 5:19)—as "non-progressives." There is a very definite fitness in these terms. Instrumental music was not commanded by Christ, no apostle ever sanctioned it, no New Testament writer ever authorized it, and no apostolic church ever practiced it. To use instrumental music in worship is indeed to be "progressive"—to "progress" beyond the things which are written.[316]

C. A. Smith

Smith, one-cup and non-Sunday school, complains of a visit to one of the "brotherhood meeting houses" in which "brothers and sisters in Christ put on a concert."[317] He complained that one would see the same thing if one attended "the Stamps Quartet, Statesman Quartet, Imperials and etc., (sic) with showmanship, rousing applause, hollering and other gestures."[318] He goes on to say that this did not occur during a "Worship Service," but he continues, "If you can use the church buildings for such carryings on, what would be wrong in our using our buildings for a 'Ladies Lectureship.' 'A Style Show,' or 'A Political Rally?'[319] How does he justify condemnation of the "Sunday afternoon" singing?" Listen to his proof text:

> Unless someone shows me I am wrong. I cannot bid "God speed" to such for I would be guilty of endorsing that which I believe is a dangerous practice. (II John 9-11), and that would make me a partaker in their evil deeds. As I have heard brother Lynwood Smith say, several times: "I am Church of Christ to the core, and I hope that it shows in every area of my walk for the Lord." Nobody likes good singing better than I do, but let us please respect God's Word, the church, our brethren and ourselves and use it to glory and praise God.[320]

We wonder how praising God in song can be classified as "evil deeds." To sing in a quartet is a "dangerous practice," according to Smith. Is 2 John 9 the Scripture that condemns quartet singing in a church building? Is this what John is saying?

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[315]I am not saying that Christians who apply 2 John 9 to other Christians that disagree with them over doctrinal matters would not advance the teaching that we should live pure lives. All I am saying is that this concept of ethical teaching is not generally stated in their expositions of this much abused text.

[316]J. Noel Meredith, "False Teachers and How to Deal with Them," in *Studies in 1, 2, 3 John***,** Sixth Annual Denton Lectures, Dub McClish, ed. (Denton Texas: Valid Publications, 1987), 270.

[317]C. A. Smith, "Special Music," *Old Paths Advocate* LXVV, no. 3 (March 1996): 4, 5.

[318]Ibid., 5.

[319]Ibid.

[320]Ibid. Even though this citation is found in footnote 4, I have recited this quotation in order to emphasize the mindset of this sincere believer.

Carl M. Johnson

Johnson, another one-cup and non-Sunday school believer, calls attention to unity meetings that Carl Ketcherside (1908-1989) and others conducted. He erroneously states that "Ketcherside argued that there are no doctrines other than the teachings concerning the person of Christ (that Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah) that are serious enough to justify a break in fellowship among believers."[321] Since Ketcherside sought to recapture the spirit of unity for which Jesus prayed, Johnson justifies his separation from Ketcherside through his citation of 2 John 9:

> The Apostle John warns, "Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son" (2 John 9). In an effort to harmonize his own position with John's words, Ketcherside argued that the expression "doctrine of Christ" does not refer to all that Jesus taught personally and through His apostles, but it refers to teaching about the nature, or the deity of Christ only. By limiting the meaning of "doctrine of Christ" in 2 John to teaching about the deity of Christ, Ketcherside and his supporters could extend open fellowship to all "sincere believers" regardless of their doctrine and practice.[322]

Johnson assumes that John is talking about what Johnson believes, but is this the case? What is the context for 2 John 9?

INSTRUCTIVE PARALLEL OF 1 JOHN 2:22-23 AND 2 JOHN 9

When we are in doubt about the correct interpretation of a passage of Scripture that is obscure in our minds, we should search for parallel constructions to assist us in correctly handling the Word of Truth. Illumination is often found when we compare Scripture with Scripture. A cardinal rule of explanation is that the *obscure* should be interpreted in the light of the *clear*, never the reverse. The interpreter is bound to consider how the subject lay in the mind of the author and to point out the exact ideas and sentiments intended. To illustrate the above principles of exposition, we should place 1 John 2:22-23 in parallel columns with 2 John 9. First John 2:22-23 is an instructive parallel to 2 John 9. I have place the following thought patterns in parallel lines:

1 John 2:22-23	**2 John 9**
Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a man is the antichrist	Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ
—he denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son	
has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son	Does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching
has the Father also.	Has both the Father and the Son.

These two citations constitute a real parallel, that is to say, a parallel of ideas. The Word of God is an organic unity of which all parts are mutually related and are subservient to the whole of God's Revelation. The Bible is its own best interpreter. From the parallel passages, one can sense that 2 John 9 is a restatement of 1 John 2:22-23. The denial that Jesus is the Christ is nothing more or less than a denial of God. To make 2 John 9

[321]Carl M. Johnson, "Trojan Horse in the Church," *Old Paths Advocate* LXX, No. 2 (February 1996): 1.
[322]Ibid., 1.

apply to instrumental music, individual communion cups, Sunday school, handclapping, raising hands, taking money out of the church treasury to assist individuals who are not Christians, and so on, is to tear this Scripture out of its context.

GNOSTICISM

If we are to interpret "doctrine of Christ" (KJV) or "teaching of Christ" (NIV) correctly, we must look to the context and to its background. From the immediate context as well as the remote context (the book itself), it is apparent that John wrote to combat the errors of Gnosticism.[323] The Gnostics were denying the Incarnation. They insisted that Christ never had a flesh-and-blood, physical, human body. They also taught that spirit alone is good and matter alone is utterly evil. Given that point of view, then, any real Incarnation is impossible.

John's concern with Gnosticism is especially seen in the following verses:

2 John 7	**1 John 4:1-3**
Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist.	Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

The Gnostics, who denied Christ having come in the flesh, were not to be received by Christians: "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching (**ταύτην τὴν διδαχὴν οὐ φέρει**, *tautēn tēn didachēn ou pherei*, 'brings not this teaching'), do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work" (2 John 10-11). Earlier, as cited above, John warns: "Many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the antichrist" (2 John 7). These two Scriptures shed light on verse 9: "Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ (**διδαχῇ τοῦ Χριστοῦ**, *didachē tou Christou*) does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son."

CONCLUSION

A correct interpretation of 2 John 9 does not advocate looseness in adhering to the teachings of Christ as advanced in the Sermon on the Mount. Both epistles of John address holiness as characteristic of every believer. The teachings that Jesus commanded in the great commission relate to the Sermon on the Mount and are summed up in this command: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." The "teaching of Christ" in 2 John 9 does not refer to the Sermon on the Mount, but rather, to the teaching about Christ's humanity (Incarnation). Christians should not tear 2 John 9 out of its context, and, then, employ this passage as a meat cleaver to hack to

[323]For a thorough analysis of "Gnosticism," see William Barclay, *The Letters of John and Jude* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977; originally published in 1958), 3-20.

death all those who disagree with their party cry for their own prevailing beliefs, which originates out of their own "interpretive community."[324]

The next Chapter in this study calls for an examination of old texts through new eyes in examining the role of women within the Christian community. Chapter 12 goes against the traditional interpretation that women are second-rate citizens in the Kingdom of God. This Chapter seeks to unravel the role that women are to have in the Great Commission issued by Jesus. We wonder why Jesus would have excluded about seventy-five percent of His work force in the proclamation of the Good News of God's way of salvation by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ upon Calvary. Special attention is given to the role women played in the Great Commission as found in Luke 24. This chapter seeks to understand the role women participated in the spread of the Gospel in the first century. Just a casual reading of this chapter reveals that the traditional teachings concerning women are not in harmony with the Word of God.

[324]Interpretive communities are composed of members who share a particular reading "strategy," or a "set of community assumptions." See M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 6th ed . (New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1993), 271. See also Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980).

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The Role of Women in the Great Commission

> The understanding of a text involves the correct mental perception of a text's meaning. Another way of saying this is that understanding involves a correct grasp of the pattern of meaning that the author willed, each individual who understands the meaning will have the same mental grasp of the author's pattern of meaning. Some understandings may be more complete than others because of a greater perception of the various implications involved, but, if an understanding is correct, it must have the same mental grasp of the author's meaning as any other understanding. Thus, although one person's understanding of meaning may be greater or more exhaustive than another's (because of a greater awareness of the various implications involved), every correct mental grasp of the author's meaning, or understanding, will be the same.[325]

Has God limited the proclamation of His mystery to the male species? The Christian community, as a whole, limits the participation of women in the Christian community. Did God intend that both men and women take part in the sharing of the mystery that had been hidden from ages past? The mystery, as defined by Paul, is Christ in us, the hope of glory. We cannot help but wonder why God would decrease His work force by at least seventy-five percent in the proclamation of the Good News. In view of the fact that this study is about the role women are to play in the Great Commission, which is the sharing of the "Mystery" of God, which is Christ, we should briefly reread Ephesians 1:9 concerning the "mystery of His will" in which He will "bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ" (1:10).

In essence, we can say that the "mystery of His will" is that the Gospel (justification through faith in His Son) is available to the Gentiles as well as to the Jews. In Jesus, God revealed that His love, His concern, His grace, and His mercy were for all humanity, not just Jews. Prior to the coming of Jesus, humanity lived in a divided world. A part of the "mystery of His will" centered on demolishing the wall of hostility that separated Jew from Gentile. Jesus came into the world to wipe out division between the Jew and the Gentile (2:11-22) through His own body upon the Tree (2:16).

The prepositional phrase "in Christ" (**ἐν Χριστῷ**, *en Christō*) captures the very core of unity. "In Christ" occurs eighty-six times in the Pauline epistles. Paul, fourteen times in the Book of Ephesians, uses this phrase to capture the foundation of this phenomenon of unity created by God.[326] This phrase is a dynamic unity of celestial (heavenly) and terrestrial (earthly) dimensions. Paul expresses this truth with great clarity:

> And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, [10] to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. (Ephesians 1:9-10)

If we understand the "mystery of God's administration of grace," this awareness should assist us in seeking to bring about unity within the Christian community, a community that is shattered into many sectarian

[325]Robert H. Stein, *A Basic guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 49.
[326]Ephesians 1:1, 3, 9, 12, 13, 20; 2:6, 7, 10, 13; 3:6, 11, 21; 4:32

camps. A consciousness of the *mystery* of salvation puts us on equal footing—Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female. The heart of this unity is that there is "one body" (2:16; 3:6; 4:4, 4:25). Since there is only "one body," we can say that this truth ("one body") is the means whereby Christ brings unity to all the warring factions (various divisions) within the Christian community. This "one body" brings unity to all the various races (every nation). This "one body" also establishes equality between men and women. Paul grabs hold of these various issues as he seeks unity among the hostile forces at work to disrupt the plan of God for the salvation of all peoples. Listen to Paul as he writes to the Galatians: "There is neither **Jew nor Greek**, **slave nor free**, **male nor female**, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

A proper concept of the phrase "in Christ" should bring about harmony among God's people. We are alienated into countless argumentative cliques over dogma. We are not speaking to one another over the race issue—blacks and whites. We are at odds over the role of women in the Christian community. We are on bad terms over the proper procedure concerning the so-called five acts of worship to be performed on Sunday morning during a so-called worship service. Since the Jew and Gentile, as well as the slave and free, are no longer problems for the church, perhaps, a few comments are in order to set the stage for the dismantling of other long-held traditions concerning the role of women in ministry and the dismantling of another long-held tradition about each distinctive group within the Churches of Christ as embodying the whole truth and nothing but the truth. We still fight like cats-and-dogs over the least infraction of our cherished beliefs, which destroys the unity of the "one body" for which our Lord prayed (John 17).

As we reflect upon the *mystery* of salvation (a salvation provided by God), we are immediately confronted with the role that women play within the Christian community created by God. Is she or is she not to preach the Gospel? Can she give testimony to the world concerning the coming of Jesus into the world as Savior? Can she give her testimony about salvation in the assembly? Can she teach in the presence of men? These are questions that this study will briefly address. Since this study is about the role women play in the scheme of redemption, it is appropriate to discuss who can proclaim the Gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation (Romans 1:17). Is the Great Commission limited to the Eleven in Mark, Luke, and John? Or does the Great Commission include all the disciples of Jesus—both men and women?

THE ROLE OF WOMEN AND CHURCH DIVISION

One of the most controversial issues within the Christian community is the proper role of women within the Christian gatherings—to speak or not to speak in the assembly. Many Christians still cite 1 Timothy 2:9-15 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 without consulting the context of these two famous passages.[327] The traditional view contradicts other clear passages. Since the Word of God does not contradict itself, then we must seek to understand the two controversial texts, as cited above, in light of their context. Whatever these passages are teaching, we know that the traditional interpretation is not correct. The Kroegers correctly point out: "It is necessary to compare Scripture with Scripture to find the current meaning. We must consider *all* that the Bible has to say about the activities of women committed to God's will."[328] Many cite these two pericopes, or sections, without reference to the context.[329] The role of women in the church has driven a wedge into the body of Christ. Do we have a right to keep alive the denunciation of women in ministry in the same way that the church employed the Scriptures to justify slavery in the nineteenth century?

In the first century church, Christians maintained diversified viewpoints. Yet, their differences were not to divide the body of Christ. Whether we employ the expression *churches of* Christ (Romans 16:16) or the

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[327]For a thorough investigation of 1 Timothy 2:9-15, see Richard Clark Kroeger and Catherine Clark Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman: Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in Light of Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992); also see Sharon Hodgin Gritz, *Paul, Women Teachers, and The Mother Goddess at Ephesus: A Study of 1 Timothy 2:9-15 in Light of The Religious and Cultural Milieu of The First Century* (New York: University Press of America, 1991).

[328]Ibid., 13.

[329]Since this essay is not designed to analyze the role of women in the church, this paper will only call attention to the more positive elements that many Christians overlook. In a forthcoming study, I will do an analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15 and 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 in order to assist Christians in a proper understanding of these two most controversial texts.

expression *churches of the* Gentiles (16:4), as found in Romans 16, still there is just "one body" (Ephesians 4:4).[330] There was not "one body" for the meat eaters and "another body" for the non-meat eaters (Romans 14:1-4).[331] There was not "one body" for the Sabbath keepers and "another body" for the non-Sabbath keepers (14:5-8). There was not "one body" for the Blacks and "another body" for the Whites (Revelation 7:9-10). There was not "one body" for the Jews and "another body" for the Gentiles (Ephesians 2:14-18). There was not "one body" for the males and "another body" for the females (Galatians 3:26-29). The prophet Joel (835 BC) wrote about the Messianic Age in which he stated that God's Spirit would be poured out on "all people," which includes females as well as males:

> I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. [29] Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. (Joel 2:28-29)

"Both men and women" were active in the ministry of Jesus as well as in the ministry of the apostles. In spite of what Joel wrote, still many churches will not allow women to **speak** in their assemblies or pray in their assemblies or **request songs** in their assemblies. In fact, some Christians will not allow women to give thanks for food in the presence of men, even in the home. Also, some advance the notion that women should not conduct private Bible studies on the off chance a man might drop in. Recently, I read two essays in which the writers (both males) took the position that women could not write about Christianity and place their essays on the Internet.[332] Why? According to these two preachers, the writer (female) of the essay would violate 1 Corinthians 14:34-35.[333] Yet, in chapter eleven of First Corinthians, Paul spoke of women praying and prophesying in the assembly (11:5). Whatever 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 is saying, it cannot contradict 1 Corinthians 11:5.[334] Luke begins his Book of Acts with the Apostles as well as the women praying together, along with the brothers of Jesus. Luke writes:

> Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk [a] from the city. [13] When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James.

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[330]The expression *churches of Christ* is no more the name of the church than the expression *churches of the Gentiles.*

[331]Even though some of the Christians were right and others were wrong, still this misunderstanding was not sufficient to disrupt the unity of the body of Christ.

[332]Greg Gay, "The Internet – 4," *Old Paths Advocate* 74, no. 1 (January 2000): 3-5. Greg writes:

> *Is a woman posting a message on a web page publicly speaking?* The posting of messages on a site for the purpose of discussing the meaning of scriptures (sic) results in the blurring of men and women's roles in teaching. Each media must be carefully examined so we do not violate Biblical principles. A woman posting an opinion about a passage of scripture (sic) on a web site that any and all can access appears to be doing public speaking to me. (pp. 4, 5)

[333]See also Alan Bonifay, "WWW.Parents/Leaders Beware," *Old Paths Advocate* LXXIV, no 4 (April 2000): 3-5, where he warns about private Bible studies and women posting essays on the Internet. He writes:

> Just how many people that might entail is open to some discussion but it is certainly less than fifty – in fact, it is probably considerably less than twenty. What that means is that when wives and daughters contribute comments to a web page forum potentially open to hundreds, if not thousands, of contributors from all over the world they are violating 1 Timothy 2:11-12 (p. 4).

[334]Look for a forthcoming study in which I will deal with 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 in context as well as 1 Timothy 2:9-15. The traditional interpretations of these two Scripture citations contradict clear passages that allow women to participate in Christian ministry, even in the assembly. It appears, so it seems to me, that 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 relates to what the Judaizers were saying, not Paul. I could not find one statement in the Old Testament where women were told to keep silent or could not take a position of leadership. The "law" relates to the traditions of the Jews, not to the Old Testament Scriptures. Also, one must interpret 1 Timothy in its context along with 2 Timothy and Titus if one expects to understand what Paul had reference to.

a That is, about 3 | 4 mile (about 1,100 meters)

[14]They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. (Acts 1:12-14)

Yes, even in the presence of the Apostles and the brothers of Jesus, one discovers that the women—even the mother of Jesus—were praying. Also, Luke records that Philip the evangelist had four daughters who prophesied (21:9). Where did they prophesy? Did they prophecy out in the cornfield to a bunch of corn stalks? Or did they prophesy to both men and women? Earlier, in his history of the Christian movement, Luke mentions the wife (Priscilla) of Aquila who participated in teaching Apollos "the way of God more adequately" (18:26).[335] Priscilla is also listed in the "hall of fame" in Romans 16 (verse 3). Eleven women are named in this chapter. Of the four names associated with the church of Philippi, three were women—Euodia and Syntyche (Philippians 4:2-3) and Lydia (Acts 16:11-15) and one a man (Clement—Philippians 4:3). Euodia and Syntyche contended (labored) with Paul at his side "in the Gospel" (4:3). Even at Thyatira (one of the seven churches of Asia Minor), the church had a woman teaching (Revelation 2:18-29). Listen to what Jesus said about this woman who calls herself a prophetess:

Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. [21] I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. [22] So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. [23] I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds. [24] Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you). [2:20-24]

God did not condemn her (Jezebel) for teaching, but rather, He condemned her for what she was teaching—"sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols" (2:20). Jezebel was teaching Gnostic philosophy. She had in essence become a Gnostic leader. Once more, God gave "her time to repent of her immorality, but she was unwilling." If it had been wrong for her to teach, we wonder why God did not say something about that. This testimony is also inferred evidence that women did take a public role in the preaching and teaching of God's Word, otherwise she would not have been accepted as a public figure within the Christian community.

In the bestowal of the Spirit upon the Church, there was no distinction of sex. Acts 2:1-4 seems to include the women mentioned in Acts 1:12-14. If so, this accounts for Peter's citation of Joel 2 in order to give validity to the unusual circumstances on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-21). The women disciples of Jesus had prepared the way for what happened on the Day of Pentecost. The right and duty of women to co-operate with men in carrying out the Great Commission cannot be questioned. All Christians are ministers of God. All believers, according to Paul, are ministers of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:17-6:2). If the traditional view concerning women is correct, we wonder why God would disenfranchise approximately three fourths, or at least one half, of His disciples from proclaiming the Good News about God's Way of salvation "in" and "through" Jesus. Since all Christians are to rejoice in the *how* of salvation, it is appropriate to briefly discuss those who have been disenfranchised from telling the *how* of salvation in any public manner, especially to men. This brief detour of the *how* and *why* of salvation focuses on an examination of Luke 24 to illustrate that the women were told to be witnesses as well as the men concerning the *how* of salvation.

[335]Priscilla is mentioned, along with her husband, seven times in the New Testament (Acts 18:2, 18, 19, 26; Romans 16:3; 1 Corinthians 16:19; and 2 Timothy 4:19). Out of the seven listings, Priscilla's name occurs first in five of the seven listings.

Women Included in the Great Commission

Luke 24

Acts 1 and 2 are a continuation of Luke 24. If we wish to understand chapters one and two of Acts, we need to reread carefully Luke 24. Just a casual reading reveals that the women were included in the "you are witnesses of these things" (24:48). On the morning of the resurrection, Luke informs Theophilus (see Acts 1:1) that the "women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb" (Luke 24:1). Upon their arrival, they discovered that the stone had been rolled away (24:2). While wondering about this event, Luke says, "In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground" (24:5). Two men stood by these women in clothing that "gleamed like lightning" (24:4). These two individuals reminded these women that Jesus had foretold this event about the resurrection to them while He was in Galilee (24:6-8).

Luke gives the names of some of these women, but not all: "It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles" (24:10). After talking with the two men, they returned to the city to tell the "Eleven" and "all the others" (24:9) that Jesus was raised. Luke reports to Theophilus that after the women met with the Apostles, and the others, that on the same day, two of those present left and headed for a "village called Emmaus," about seven miles from Jerusalem (24:13). Luke informs Theophilus that Jesus suddenly appeared to these two men as they were discussing the events that had just transpired in Jerusalem about the crucifixion (24:13-32). During the course of the conversation, these two disciples related to the stranger (Jesus) what had been reported to them by the women who had gone earlier to the tomb (24:22-24).

Following this encounter with Jesus, Luke reports: "They got up and returned once more to Jerusalem" (24:33a) For a second time, we observe the gathering of possibly the one hundred and twenty mentioned in Acts 1. "There they found the Eleven and those with them assembled together" (24:33b), which included the women. Yet again, Jesus appears in their presence (24:36) as he had previously appeared before the women at the Resurrection and the two men whom Jesus had talked on the way to Emmaus. Just as Jesus had earlier unfolded the Scriptures to these men, Jesus again, unfolds the meaning of the Old Testament Scriptures concerning His sufferings and death and resurrection (24:45-47). After this revelation of the Messianic prophecies concerning Himself, He says to the Eleven and to the others, "You are witnesses of these things. [49] I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high" (24:48-49).

This promise—outpouring of the Holy Spirit—is generally limited to the Twelve on the Day of Pentecost. But this promise was to be poured out on both men and women, not just the Apostles. According to Joel, the promise of the Father was to be poured out on both men and women. Luke corroborates the fulfillment of Joel's Messianic prophecy (Acts 2). Individuals who wish to reach certain doctrinal conclusions by assimilating their presuppositions and their attitudes toward women sterilize this truth—both men and women were present and were to receive the Holy Spirit (Joel 2).

Proper biblical hermeneutics demand that every interpreter look at the context. Our failure to appreciate the context will lead us to give undue acquiescence to an excessively biased point of view. According to the context of Luke 24, the women were also present among those in attendance with the Eleven. The context of Luke 24 reveals that the women, along with the men, were to be "witnesses of these things" and "clothed with power upon high" (24:48-49). The Great Commission was not/is not limited to the male species.

One Hundred and Twenty: Men and Women

Acts 1

We should read the first two chapters of Acts in conjunction with the last chapter of Luke in order to follow the continuity of Luke's comments in Acts 1 and 2. Luke 24 concludes his Gospel with two outstanding statements—(1) "witness of these things" and (2) "clothed with power upon high." Just a casual reading of the

Gospel accounts reveals a revolutionary doctrine of liberation for women—a liberation from degradation and inferiority. As stated above, in Acts 1, Luke records the presence of the Eleven in an upper room, along with "the women and Mary the mother of Jesus," which also included the brothers of Jesus (1:12-14).

This number totaled one hundred and twenty (1:15). The significant fact is, as stated above, that the women prayed alongside of the apostles and the others: "They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers" (1:14). This Scripture runs contrary to the practice of many Christians today. Not only did the women pray in this gathering of the one hundred and twenty, but they also took part in casting lots in the choosing of Mathias (1:22-26). There is no indication, from the context, that this selection process (casting lots) was limited only to the men.

Yet again, some repetition is necessary for us to follow the logical sequence of events in order to show conclusively that the women were present in the events that transpired following the resurrection of Jesus (Luke 24:36-49). Hopefully, repetition may be pardoned here, for the minds of many Christians are so leavened by the traditions of the church Fathers that vital truths are difficult to see. Since truth is so often the projection of the particular views of the powerful, it is necessary to go back to the Scriptures and reread with freshness. In other words, the traditions of the church make it difficult, if not impossible, to read the Bible afresh.

Once more, we cannot read this unit of Scripture (23:47-49) without a consciousness of two things: (**1**) the witnesses included women, and (**2**) the women who followed Jesus from Galilee were witnesses. Pay attention to Luke, as cited above, as he writes: "The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it" (23:55). The phrase "from Galilee" flashes like neon lights alongside the mention of "women." Why? Were they to witness concerning Jesus? As Luke continues his scenario, he sets forth the prominence of the women's role following the Resurrection. Remember, following the burial of Jesus, **the women** took spices to the tomb (24:1).

They found the stone rolled away and entered the tomb (24:2). Whereupon, they were frightened, and Luke says, "**the women** bowed down" (24:5). The two men questioned them about why they were looking for the living among the dead (24:5). Again, we observe the use of the word ***Galilee*** in the course of the conversation by the two men: "He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you **in Galilee**" (24:6). It was not just the Apostles that Jesus told about His impending death while in Galilee—women were included. The expressions ***from Galilee*** and ***in Galilee*** are important phrases in trying to ascertain whether or not women were included in the command to witness to others about the *how* of salvation.

Can we in our wildest imagination edit out the women from "those with them"? The women play a major role in this section of Scripture (see also Acts 1:12-15). Jesus appears to His disciples. Should we limit the word *disciple* only to the male species? Surely not! There is no evidence to uphold that the word *disciple* refers only to males. Suddenly Jesus stood among them (both men and women). Still there was unbelief on the part of the disciples. He told them to look at His hands and His feet in order to prove that He was not a ghost, for a ghost does not have flesh and bones (24:37-41).

After that, He opened their minds so they could understand what the prophets had earlier spoken of (24:47). He then informed those present (both men and women) that they were to be "witnesses of all these things" (24:48). At that time, Jesus let them know that He would send the promise of His Father upon each of them (24:40). But they were instructed to wait in Jerusalem until they were clothed with this power from on high (24:49). Did the Eleven and the other disciples, which included women, understand that they were all to wait in Jerusalem for this outpouring of God's Spirit upon both men and women? Yes! As stated above, the first chapter of Acts reveals that there were one hundred and twenty who were gathered in Jerusalem waiting for the events to transpire (Acts 1:15).

Once more, if the women were not included, we wonder why Peter did not say so. In fact, he cited the prophet Joel to show that Joel had previously foretold the phenomenon that they were now witnessing:

> Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. [15]These men (οὗτοι Joutoi) are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! [16]No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: [17] 'In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old

men will dream dreams. [18] Even on my servants, **both** men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy. [19] I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke. [20]The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. [21] And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'"[a] (Joel 2:14-21)

In Acts 2:1, Luke writes: "When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place." On the Day of Pentecost, the outpouring of the Spirit is generally limited to the Twelve among many interpreters of the Word, but, according to Peter, the outpouring of the Spirit was upon the one hundred and twenty:

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. [2] Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. [3] They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. [4] All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues [a] as the Spirit enabled them. (Acts 2:1-4)

Women Who Followed Jesus from Galilee

Acts 13:31

In just a casual reading of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, we do not, under normal circumstances, catch a glimpse of the importance of this phrase in analyzing the role of women in the proclamation of God's Good News. The phrase "**from Galilee**" plays a significant role in our interpretation of the role of women in Christian ministry. For example, an angel of God uses this phrase "in Galilee" in calling attention to their (the women) travels with Jesus (Luke 24:6). Another example is found in the Book of Mark. As Jesus hung suspended between heaven and earth, Mark gives an insightful note concerning the women who had followed Jesus "**from Galilee**." Luke specifically mentions three women at the crucifixion by name, but he does not stop there. He also says that in addition to these three there were "many other women." What is significant about all of this is what Mark says about where these women came from:

Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. [41] **In Galilee** these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there. (Mark 15:40-41)

Once more, the geographical name "Galilee" plays a major role in understanding the role of women in Christian ministry. Matthew, too, gives information about these women who came from Galilee:

Many women were there, watching from a distance. They had followed Jesus **from Galilee** to care for his needs. [56] Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's sons. (Matthew 27:55-56)

Again, this information about women following Jesus "**from Galilee**" is extremely important. Not only did Mark and Matthew call attention to this devotion among the women, but Luke also details this same information. Listen to Luke as he writes: "The women who had come with Jesus **from Galilee** followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it" (Luke 23:55). In the reading of Mark and Matthew, one name stands out in BOLD—Mary Magdalene. Following Luke's statement about the women "**from Galilee**," he then proceeds to list the names of some of these women:

When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. [10] It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. [11] But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. (24:9-11)

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a Joel 2:28-32

a Or *languages*; also in verse 11

This information from Mark, Matthew, and Luke, along with the full context, leads us to realize that the Great Commission was not given only to the Eleven, but to all those present—both men and women. If we wish to understand the ones to whom this commission was given, we must read and reread the entire context for contextual understanding. An understanding of the full text sheds light on the role women were/are to play in the proclamation of God's Good News to a lost and dying world. The women who discovered the empty tomb returned to tell the Apostles what had transpired (Luke 24:9). Yet, the Apostles refused to believe, as Luke says, "nonsense" (24:11).

Once more, repetition is necessary in order to drive home the point that women did share in ministry in the early church and to keep continuity in the analysis of Luke 24 with reference to the women's presence with the apostles and others. On this same day, Luke records two of His disciples on the road going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem (24:13).[336] On this road, Jesus suddenly appeared to these two men and struck up a conversation. In the course of the conversation, these men related what the women had said about the empty tomb and that Jesus was alive (24:22-24). It was then that Jesus rebukes them for their lack of faith (24:25). Jesus then explained to them what the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms had said about Him (24:27).

After Jesus went to their home and broke bread and gave to them, Luke says that their eyes were opened and they recognized Jesus (24:30-31). As we seek to unravel the part that the women played in this part of God's announcement of the Resurrected Christ, we should always be conscious that this background is necessary in order to follow the logical sequence of what is about to follow. Following this episode with Jesus, Luke writes: "They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found **the Eleven** and **those with them**, assembled together" (24:33). They found not only "the Eleven," but also "those with them." These two men related their stories, and while they were speaking, the Lord Jesus "stood **among them**" (24:36). He showed them His hands and His feet (24:39). A conversation erupted between Jesus and His disciples; it was at this point that Luke writes:

> Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. [46] He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, [47] and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. [48] You are witnesses of these things. [49] I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." (24:45-49)

Both men and women were present! Jesus informed His disciples—both men and women—that repentance and forgiveness of sins would be preached in His name to all nations. Jesus did not limit this commission just to the male species, but rather he issued this statement to all the disciples present—"You are witnesses" (24:33). Also, in verse 48, Jesus says, "You are witnesses of these things." All the disciples—both men and women—were to wait in Jerusalem until they received the promise from on high. Luke gives the fulfillment of this "promise from on high" in Acts 2.

While they were assembled, the one hundred and twenty cast lots for the selection of one to take the place of Judas (1:23-26). Luke writes: "Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles" (1:26). The very next verse reads: "When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place" (2:1). On this occasion Luke reports:

> Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. [3] They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. [4] All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues [a] as the Spirit enabled them. (2:2-4)

As stated above, sometimes repetition is necessary in order to uproot long-held traditions. There are three laws of learning that everyone should commit to memory: REPETITION, REPETITION, and

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[336]Some repetition is necessary in order to keep continuity in the development of the role women played in the proclamation of the Good News.

a Or *languages*; also in verse 11

REPETITION. If this event did not occur upon both men and women (one hundred and twenty), we still wonder why Peter cited the prophecy of Joel (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2:14-21) about "your sons and daughters will prophesy. . . . Even on my servants, both men and women" (2:17, 18). If the women were totally silent on the Day of Pentecost, why did Peter cite this prophecy about women?

Daughters and women stand out in this prophecy. Why did he stress "both men and women"? Our awareness of this prophecy calls to mind the words of Paul as he preached Jesus in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:13-52). What is remarkable about this pericope is found in his discourse about the witnesses (13:31). After relating to his hearers about Jesus' crucifixion and entombment and resurrection, Paul says: "And for many days he was seen by those who had traveled with him **from Galilee** to Jerusalem. They are now his witnesses to our people" (13:31).

According to Paul, whoever traveled with Jesus "**from Galilee**" are "now" witnesses of these events. Did women travel with Jesus "from Galilee"? As noted above, Mark, as he concludes his Gospel, calls attention to many women who had traveled with Jesus "**from Galilee**" to Jerusalem (Mark 15:40-41); Matthew also beckons notice to several women who traveled with Jesus "**from Galilee**" to Jerusalem (Matthew 27-55-56); Luke, too, summons awareness to women who had traveled with Jesus "**from Galilee**" to Jerusalem (Luke 23:55). Earlier, Luke records the number of several women by name who traveled with Jesus "from one town and village to another" (8:1-3).

Did Paul exclude the women as witnesses in Acts 13:31? If so, there is nothing in the context to indicate that God disenfranchised the women from witnessing concerning the Resurrection of Jesus. Were the women witnesses of the Resurrection? Did Jesus refer to women as witnesses when the disciples were gathered together after the Resurrection (see Luke 24)? Did Jesus promise His Spirit upon both men and women in the Great commission (see Luke 24)? Again, two things stand out in Acts 13:31—"Those who had traveled with Him **from Galilee** to Jerusalem" and "They are now witnesses to our people." Earlier, Luke, in the conclusion of his Gospel, speaks of the women as witnesses of the crucifixion and their having followed Jesus "**from Galilee**":

> The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, "Surely this was a righteous man." [48] When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. [49] But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things. (Luke 23:47-49)

The following Chapter (13) explores the myth of interpreting the Word of God with a wooden literalness as well as the fallacy of interpreting isolated Scriptures from its context. We cannot necessarily just take the Scriptures at face value without seeking to understand the intent of the author. We are to employ sound methods of interpretation in seeking to unfold the intended meaning of any text. We need to develop the habit of working with the text in order to hear what the original hearers heard. Hopefully, this chapter will assist our understanding of the original setting in order to help remove twentieth century bifocals and journey back into the first century, to stand upon their threshold, to see through their eyes, and to think their thoughts. **God's people must seek to read the Bible without colored glasses, which often leads to distortions.** We must guard against our interpretation as equal to that of Scripture. To accomplish these objectives, it is necessary to learn how to read the Gospel of Matthew and the Pastoral Epistles.

13

Literalism and Isolationism of Scripture

> In order to gain a knowledge of any level, it is necessary to possess an appropriate preunderstanding that correlates with what is to be interpreted at that level. An appropriate preunderstanding means that generally four factors must be present: (1) there must be a certain amount of correct information about what is to be interpreted; (2) there must be an attitude present that is open and receptive to making contact with the subject to be interpreted; (3) there must be an ideological structure that is sufficiently flexible and adaptable to treat fairly and objectively that which is to be interpreted; and (4) there must be a methodological approach that is appropriate to the subject to be interpreted.[337]

We frequently read the Word of God with wooden literalness, and, at the same time, interpret Scriptures in isolation from their context. Through carelessness in not handling the Word of God properly, Christians repeatedly divide over the interpretations of particular Scriptures handed down through the centuries. It is not uncommon for us to replace long-held interpretations with the Word itself. Within the Christian community, misapplication of Scriptures became normative and was passed on to succeeding generations as authoritative. This chapter on 1 Timothy 2:9-15 explores several historical records of the way many Christians seek to strengthen their opinions through the quotation of Scripture.

For hundreds of years, we have cited the Bible to prove our traditions or opinions about science, about medicine, and about theology. In the distant past, we discover that Christians rejected the works of Galileo on so-called biblical citations. This was just the tip of the iceberg, the Scriptures were not only employed against him, but many Christians also rejected innovations in the medical field through the quotations of biblical passages. Today numerous Christians justify their intolerance of other Christians through the misapplication of selected and isolated Scriptures.

Unfortunately tradition still governs many of the theological debates today. Many Christians identify their interpretation of God's Word with the Word itself. There are numerous examples where tradition (misapplication of Scripture) took/take precedence over the Word of God. One such example is found in the field of medicine. Donald. T. Atkinson (M.D.) wrote an informative book about the rise of medical science and its beginnings in ritual and magic and of the people who freed it from ignorance.

Just a perusal of his book reveals the illegal use of Scripture that many theologians and non-theologians relied upon in order to deny medical breakthroughs on unfounded religious claims. In one of his chapters, he went right to the heart of the human mind in its rejection of any new concept (We have never done it that way before.), which mental concept is still true not only of science but also of religious thought that differs from our own brand of orthodoxy. He calls attention to the devastating effects of tradition on the minds of both men and women with the following insightful analysis:

[337]Duncan S. Ferguson, *Biblical Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1986), 17.

> The most hurtful habit of the human mind is this tendency to cling to traditions which have withstood the moss, rust, and decay of the past. We seem to hold to our old thoughts with a veneration which is as infallible as it is inexplicable. This unhappy mental faculty makes the mind inaccessible to plain reason and leads toward intolerance.[338]

Since this study is concerned with the abuse of 1 Timothy 2:9-15, within almost every Christian community, we must take pains to discuss the proper use of Scripture in drawing conclusions from a specific text. Before we undertake an analysis of this most badly treated text, it would be helpful to investigate other issues to call attention to the proper methods of interpretation as we seek to untangle the true meaning of a passage(s).

As briefly stated above, to set the stage for a correct appreciation of this most controversial text, it is necessary to scrutinize other oddities that were upheld by many sincere persons to give credence to their unfounded positions and the basic principle of interpretation. This present chapter will analyze the wooden literalness of Scriptural interpretation. The church as a whole has habitually read 1 Timothy 2:9-15 to uphold the time-honored belief that women are not to be trusted or used in the teaching of God's Word, especially in a congregational setting.

BASIC RULES OF INTERPRETATION

History and Culture

As we seek to unravel this controversial text, we must always bear in mind that hermeneutics (interpretation) is not done in a vacuum. The interpreter generally gives his or her explanation of a passage within his or her own religious culture. In order to interpret the Word of God correctly, we must step outside our own spiritual heritage and read the text with fresh eyes. We must seek to exegete the wording in light of its context. We should never read into the passage(s) what we wish the author to say. We should guard against the common tendency to read into the text our own presuppositions. Charles Trombley gives eight rules to apply to a proper interpretation of any document. The following is his list of rules that legal experts employ:

1. **Rule of Definition**. Define the terms of words being considered and then adhere to the defined meanings.
2. **Rule of Usage**. Don't add meanings to established words and terms. What was the common usage in the culture and time period when the passage was written?
3. **Rule of Context**. Avoid using words out of context. Context must define terms and how words are used.
4. **Rule of Historical Background**. Don't separate interpretation and historical investigation.
5. **Rule of Logic**. Be certain that words as interpreted agree with the overall premise.
6. **Rule of Precedent**. Use the known and commonly accepted meanings of words, not obscure meanings for which there is no precedent.
7. **Rule of Unity**. Even though many documents may be used there must be a general unity among them.
8. **Rule of Inference**. Base conclusion on what is already known and proven or can be reasonably implied from all known facts.[339]

First Timothy is embodied within a certain history and culture. Since this is so, we must seek from the context the problem(s) that the author was seeking to deal. Without an understanding of what was going on at the time of the writing, we cannot expect to arrive at an accurate comprehension. As a result of this failure to consult the full context, this pericope (unit of Scripture) has become one of the most abused texts within the Christian community. Just a casual reading of the religious journals reveals that this pericope is plastic, that is to say, it is frequently and easily molded into the preconceived ideas of the interpreter, not the intent of the author.

The weakness of many interpreters is that one's presuppositions are often read into the Scriptures rather than being read out of Scripture. Countless Christians tend to confuse their view of Scripture with their own explanation. If someone disagrees with the long-established view of a passage, then that person is unsound, at

[338]Donald T. Atkinson, *Magic, Myth and Medicine* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1956), 272.
[339]Charles Trombley, *Who Said Women Can't Teach?* (South Plainfield, NJ: Bridge Publishing, Inc., 1985), 135-136.

least, according to some churches. On the surface, what seems plausible as our commitment to Scripture is often the commitment to our own reading of Scripture.

Isolation of Context

One of the great fallacies in the study of Scripture is reference to Scripture in isolation from its own unique context. There is nothing wrong with quoting Scripture, but we must exert every effort to apply the passage correctly. Numerous Christians labor under the impression that if they can quote a Scripture verbatim, then that settles the matter. But this exact quotation by the reader is not the whole story. If we fail to hear the intent of the author, we neglect to pay attention to the Word of God. We should allow the Word of God in its full context to be the final word, not tradition. It is not uncommon for us to pick and choose on the basis of our own cultural heritage in our own unique explanation of Scripture. We must learn to reevaluate and reinterpret what has been handed down to us from the church leaders. Robert Stein is correct when he writes: "To understand the divine meaning of Scripture, then, is to understand the conscious meaning of God's inspired servants who wrote them."[340]

APPLYING SOUND PRINCIPLES OF INTERPRETATION

> Like any growth, development may be healthy or it may be malignant; discerning the difference between these two kinds of growth requires constant research into the pathology of traditions. But it is healthy development that keeps a tradition both out of the cancer ward and out of the fossil museum.[341]

To further illustrate how to apply sound principles in the field of biblical interpretation, this section analyzes certain key Scriptures from the Book of Matthew in order to drive home the point of watertight beliefs of interpretation before we advance a particular view about a text(s). In the nineteenth century, **Friedrich Schleiermacher** (1768-1834), German theologian and philosopher, originated the idea of the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle philosophy simply means: "**Each part of a text must be interpreted with reference to the whole; yet the meaning of the whole cannot be grasped without considering the parts**."[342] Interpretation is an attempt to understand the work as a whole by an analysis of its elements.[343] Hermeneutics[344] ordinarily covers the whole field of interpretation, including exegesis.[345] Nevertheless, hermeneutics is often used in a much narrower sense to grasp the relevance of ancient works. In other words, it is concerned about the "here" and "now."[346] Louis. Berkhof (1873-1957), Reformed theologian, makes the following succinct observation:

The *necessity* of the study of hermeneutics follows from several considerations:

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[340]Robert H. Stein, *A Basic guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 28.

[341]Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 60.

[342]Kathleen Morner and Ralph Rausch, "Hermeneutics," *NTC's Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Illinois: NTC Publishing Group, 1991), 97.

[343] Ibid.

[344] See Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 17, where Stein writes: "The term 'hermeneutics,' . . . simply describes the practice or discipline of interpretation." See also Thomas H. Olbright, *Hearing God's Voice* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1996), 185, where he says, "In a large sense, hermeneutics constitutes a theory about how one person explains or communicates a text to another."

[345]See Morner and Rausch, "Exegesis," Ibid., 72,73, where they say, "Originally, the detailed analysis, explanation, and INTERPRETATION of passages in the Bible, or, by extension, of any literary or intellectual text. The term carries with it a sense of digging out the meaning of a difficult passage."

[346]See Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*: A Guide to Understanding the Bible (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 25.

1. Sin darkened the understanding of man, and still exercises a pernicious influence on his conscious mental life. Therefore, special efforts must be made to guard against error.
2. Men differ from one another in many ways that naturally cause them to drift apart mentally. They differ, for instance,
   (a) in intellectual capacity, aesthetic taste, and moral quality resulting in a lack of spiritual affinity:
   (b) in intellectual attainment, some being educated, and others uneducated; and
   (c) in nationality, with a corresponding difference in language, forms of thought, customs, and morals.[347]

Hayes and Holiday define exegesis as an attempt "to reach an informed understanding of the text."[348] It is possible for an interpreter to miss the point of the text if he or she does not consider the "linguistic, cultural, and historical background to the inspired writings," writes Cedric Johnson.[349] It is also in this vein that Berkhof cautions Christians not to fall into the same trap that many fell into during the Reformation. Berkhof again sharpens the focus of caution:

> The militant spirit of the age found expression in hundreds of polemical writings. Each one sought to defend his own opinion with an appeal to Scripture. *Exegesis became the handmaid of dogmatics, and degenerated into a mere search for proof-texts.* The Scriptures were studied in order to find there the truths that were embodied in the Confessions.[350]

Many Christians encounter long-held traditions in his or her quest to understand the Word of God in its context.[351] It is not uncommon for believers to identify the traditions of their "interpretative community" with the Word itself. Johnson expresses the basic problem well in his discussion of presuppositions:

> Generations of scholars in the field of hermeneutics have recognized the influence of preunderstanding on interpretation. C. S. Lewis observed that "what we learn from experience depends on the kind of philosophy we bring to experience."[352]

Untold numbers with whom I have discussed the science of exposition have shared their frustrations and have described their Christian journeys as "**Gullible's Travels**."[353] We often accept what we are taught without question. It is in this sense that our interpretation is neither subjective nor objective. In other words, we have never taken the time to employ our minds subjectively in analyzing the Scripture for ourselves, nor have we looked at the Scriptures objectively. Our interpretations are "ready-made or prefabricated meanings."[354] Our interpretations are hand-me-downs from our interpretative community. Again, Fish rightly says, "In other words

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[347]L. Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962), 12.

[348]John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook,* revised edition (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1987), 23.

[349]Cedric B. Johnson, *The Psychology of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 20. See also Dallas Burdette, "Passover Traditions in the Time of Christ" in *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood, FL: Xulon, 2008), 181-195 for an example of the application of the above principles—"linguistic, cultural, and historical background."

[350] Berkhof, *Interpretation*, 28-29.

[351] See Hayes and Holladay, *Exegesis*, 66, where they write:

> The best guide to the meaning of a word is the context in which it is used. This means, first of all, the immediate context of the passage in which it occurs. If a word has several meanings, one should explore the range of meanings and see how they fit or do not fit in the context. A broader context is the whole of the document in which the terms appear. One should explore how a term is used and what it denotes elsewhere in the document.

[352] Johnson, *Interpretation*, 45.

[353]See Dallas Burdette, "Dallas Burdette's "*My* Pilgrimage of Faith" in *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood FL: Xulon, 2008), 1-26, which chapter develops the evolution of my thinking in my Christian journey. This chapter is informative in that I discuss basic principles of how to interpret Scriptures. This study discusses many of the "pit falls" that I encountered on my spiritual journey as a boy preacher. To a great extent, my earlier spiritual journey could be described as "Gullible's Travels."

[354]Stanley Fish, *Is There A Text in This Class?* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980), 172.

interpretive[355] communities are no more stable than texts because interpretive strategies are not natural or universal, but learned."[356] In spite of Fish's deconstruction philosophy, nevertheless, he is correct when he writes:

> And, moreover, the way of seeing, whatever it was, would never be individual or idiosyncratic, since its source would always be the institutional structure of which the "see-er" was an extending agent. This is what Sacks means when he says that a culture fills brains "so that they are alike in fine detail"; it fills them so that no one's interpretive acts are exclusively his own but fall to him by virtue of his position in some socially organized environment and are therefore always shared and public.[357]

Leaders, especially ministers, often memorize verses from the Bible by the hundreds. But their interpretation frequently is not so much theirs, as it is the interpretation of a social structure to which they belong; that is to say, their interpretative community. Traditions still stand in the way of listening anew to the biblical text.[358] Once more, the Gonzalezs' caution: "We must learn to reevaluate and reinterpret what has been handed down to us."[359] It is still very difficult for us to conceive that we might cite Scripture and, at the same time, fail to apply the text correctly in light of its historical background.

Some religious writers suppose they have all the answers, and as a result of this kind of intellectualization, the intellectually correct party ostracizes those who go against the grain with their particular interpretative community. It is not uncommon for Christians to justify condemnation over against the so-called nonconformist by citing Matthew 7:15 out of context, which reads: "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves." We may quote Matthew 7:15 or 1 Timothy 2:9-15 correctly, but we must also examine the context before drawing conclusions.

We must be careful that we do not go to the Scriptures to prove what we already believe, but rather to see what they say. We are so accustomed to reading the Bible as previously taught by generations of interpreters that we cannot distinguish between interpretation and Revelation. In other words, for one to question the traditional interpretations is tantamount to questioning the Word of God itself.[360] This failure to discriminate between explanation and Divine inspiration is one of the main obstacles that we encounter in our efforts to liberate the Bible from its culture and to maintain unity among God's people. The heritage of explaining is confused with the text itself. The faith of the fathers becomes the watchword for orthodoxy; the interpretation of the fathers becomes normative and is passed on as authoritative.

One of the most difficult obstacles for any Christian is to approach the text without any strong personal biases. Studying the Bible with colored glasses ultimately leads to distortion of the text.[361] We often tend to

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[355]Fish does not use "interpretative community" but "interpretive community."

[356] Ibid. I disagree with Fish's philosophy of the text being unstable. If I understand Fish correctly, he is a deconstructionist in his philosophy. See Morner and Rausch, "Deconstructive Criticism," *NTC's Dictionary*, 50-51, where they explain "deconstruction":

> An approach to LITERARY CRITICISM based on the views and procedures of the French thinker Jacques Derrida. Deconstructive criticism utilizes reader-centered theories of meaning that ignore reference to the author's intention and deny the possibility of a terminate meaning or "correct" interpretation for any text. Deconstructive criticism makes possible innumerable contradictory but "undecidable" meanings. First becoming prominent in the 1970s, deconstructive criticism is central to POST-STRUCTURALISM.

[357]Ibid., 335.

[358]See Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 48-68.

[359]Ibid., 31.

[360]For an insightful article on the differentiation between Revelation and interpretation, see Leroy Garrett, "It Means What It Says," *Restoration Review* 17, no. 4 (April 1975): 68-71.

[361]See Johnson, *Interpretation* , 42, where he captures, in concise language, the subjective biases of all interpreters:

> My contention is that conflicting theological positions are in part due to the fact that we all approach a text, sacred or secular, with our strong subjective biases. Even though we have a commitment to read the Bible on its own terms: and

give preconceived beliefs the same authority as we give to the Bible. In other words, our preconceived political power is equal to that of the Scriptures. Our own personal journey of faith, with the ghosts of the past, makes it very difficult for us to view the Scriptures without prejudice. Our prior understanding and interpretation makes it difficult to sift out the truths of God in dealing with the text.[362] The culture of our heritage controls the text of the Bible. We should never forget that our own journey occurs within a vast architecture of preunderstanding—no thinking takes place in a vacuum. Frederic W. Farrar (1831-1903), Dean of Canterbury and author, draws attention to the religious hatred that generates from this know-it-all attitude:

> My opinions are founded on interpretations of Scripture. Scripture is infallible. My views of its meaning are infallible too. Your opinions and inferences differ from mine; therefore you must be in the wrong. All wrong opinions are capable of so many ramifications that any one who differs from me in minor points must be unsound in vital matters also. Therefore all who differ from me and my clique are "heretics." All heresy is wicked; all heretics are necessarily wicked men. It is my religious duty to hate, calumniate and abuse you.[363]

Contextual Interpretation

The first step in explaining Scripture is to read the text. To fathom a passage involves the immediate context, the remote context, and the larger context. The *immediate context* includes verses preceding and following the reference that one is studying. On the other hand, the *remote context* may take in the entire book in which the text is found. Also, the *larger context* may embrace the whole of God's written Revelation. This understanding of contexts helps to determine the meaning or meanings that we attach to any distinct phrase.

Otherwise, we may impose conjectured convictions on a text without due reflection upon what the author says. Without a conception of a context, a person's particular context tends to shape his or her understanding and interpretation of the message. Sidney Greidanus is correct when he says, "An interpreter must be careful not to read more into a text than is actually there at that particular stage of redemptive history."[364]

Merely reciting Scriptures that draw attention to certain party dogmas is not sufficient to determine the meaning of the text. Remember that the context is the determining factor in trying to arrive at a correct insight. We must <u>not</u> employ Holy Scripture in a way the Holy Spirit did not employ them. Leroy Garrett points out with justification that

> People tire of our equating our understanding of the word of God with the word of God itself. This is to say that we must distinguish between revelation and interpretation. Revelation is what God has given us in scripture. Interpretation is what we conclude the scriptures to mean. One is divine, the other human.[365]

To use an example as cited above, we may cite Matthew 7:15—"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves"—correctly, but not necessarily speak *as* the Bible speaks. We may speak ***<u>where</u>*** the Bible speaks and not speak ***<u>as</u>*** the Bible speaks. In order to understand this passage of Scripture, it is necessary to study the whole of Matthew's Gospel before analyzing individual elements. The same is true with 1 Timothy 2:9-15. We must study the whole of the Pastoral Epistles before analyzing individual elements.

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even though we want the Divine and human authors to speak for themselves, somehow we still come up with contradictory views on some issues.

[362]For an excellent presentation of this concept, see Gonzalez and Gonzalez, "Difficulties in Hearing the Text," in *Preaching*, 29-47.

[363]Frederick W. Farrar, "Religious Hatred," quoted in Carl Ketcherside, *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 6 (June 1965): 92.

[364]Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 71.

[365]Garrett, "It Means What It Says," 69.

View of the Whole versus the Particular

As we contemplate a study of the whole of Matthew's Gospel or a study of the Pastoral Epistles, it is imperative that we examine the full text of each book before an analysis of its parts (for example, Matthew 7:15 and 1 Timothy 2:9-15). If a reader explores a specific verse without weighing its sum total, then one's reflection may radically alter a correct view of a particular text. Examples of particularization of texts without contexts to support certain dogmatic presuppositions are rampant among many Christians. We may consider the following isolated Scriptures as examples of frequently cited texts that are misapplied by many sincere Christians to uphold a sectarian spirit that divides the Christian community for which Jesus prayed (John 17).

- Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. (Matthew 7:15)
- Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. (7:13-14)
- If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell. (5:29-30)
- But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. (5:39)
- Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. (7:1-2)
- I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, [10] but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. [11] A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. [12] I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. [13] For Adam was formed first, then Eve. [14] And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. [15] But women [a] will be saved [b] through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety. (1 Timothy 2:9-15)

It is not uncommon for interpreters to impose their own conceptual grids on a text without due reflection. When we approach the Word of God, we should approach with a hermeneutics of suspicion. In other words, we should be conscious of our own fallibility in interpreting Scriptures. Our interpretation should always remain the object of suspicion and of critical evaluation. We must have a self-critical stance toward the tendency to impose our own agenda upon the exposition of Scripture. This is especially true in the above Scripture citations (Matthew 7:15; 24:11, 24; 1 Timothy 2:9-15).

For many believers, false prophets (7:15) are those who disagree with their brand of orthodoxy or interpretation of Scripture, especially with relationship to the role of women in the Christian community. Also, many appeal to the Scripture (7:13-14) about the small gate and the narrow road to give credence to their particular denominational stance as the only way to heaven. As a result of literalism, some Christians have even taken the self-mutilation language (5:29-30) as a call to physical impairment of the body. Among some religious movements, the turning of the right cheek (5:39) is cited as justification for not defending one's country in the time of war. Again, we must ask: what is the context?

We cannot necessarily just take the Scriptures at face value without seeking to understand the intent of the author. We are to employ sound methods of interpretation in seeking to unfold the intended meaning of any text. We need to develop the habit of working with the text in order to hear what the original hearers heard. Hopefully, this chapter will assist our understanding of the original setting in order to help remove Twentieth Century bifocals and journey back into the First Century, to stand upon their threshold, to see through their eyes, and to think their thoughts. God's people must seek to read the Bible without colored glasses, which often

a Greek *she*
b Or *restored*

leads to distortions. We must guard against our interpretation as equal to that of Scripture. To accomplish these objectives, it is necessary to learn how to read the Gospel of Matthew and the Pastoral Epistles.

ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE MISUSE OF SCRIPTURE

Eufame MacLayne

A classic example of the misuse of Scripture is found in the tragic story of Eufame MacLayne (AD 1591). Her story reveals the mindset of literalness and isolation of Scripture by Christians in the Sixteenth Century. Bernard Seeman wrote a book about man's endeavor to relieve pain in suffering. He recounts the story of Eufame MacLayne who took an herb to lessen her pain during the birth of twins. But according to the church fathers, this action violated the Law of God and was also contempt for the Crown. They based their views on what God had said to Eve: "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children" (Genesis 3:16).

As a result of a midwife's (Agnes Sampson, unknown-executed, (she died, January 28th, 1591, as a witch) concern for pain, she provided her with the medicine she needed to relieve some of the pain during childbirth. Because Eufame took something to help alleviate her pain, she was brought before the church leaders and condemned to death. She had her twins taken forcibly from her and then she was forcibly chained to a stake and reduced to ashes.[366] This mindset originated with the literal interpretation of Scripture, not its intent.

Sir James Simpson

Seeman also relates another story about the introduction of anesthetics for the relief of pain.[367] In 1847, **Sir James Simpson** (1811-1870), British physician, discovered the anesthetic properties of chloroform.[368] After learning about the success of ether in the United States, he immediately started using this with his patients. As a result of the smell and irritating actions of ether, he looked for a less troublesome anesthetic. He ultimately decided upon chloroform that had been recently discovered by a German chemist, **Justus von Leibig**.[369] After publishing his results, he came under attack from "fellow physicians, from the clergy, from teachers, from the

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[366]Bernard Seeman, *Man Against Pain: 3000 Years of Effort to Understand and Relieve Physical Suffering* (Philadelphia: Chilton Company, 1962), 96. See also Andrew D. White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*, vol., 2 (New York: George Braziller, 1955), 62, 63. Volumes 1 and 2 are combined in one volume. See also Dr. Donald T. Atkinson, *Magic, Myth and Medicine* (New York: The World Publishing Company, 1956), 271-272, in which he too recounts this tragic story:

> Looking down on the new beautiful Princes Street of Edinburgh, Scotland, is Castle Hill. Here in 1591 a crime was committed which illustrates the old-time psychology. Up this hill, one bleak morning, was forcibly dragged Eufame MacLayne, a lady of rank and refinement. A few minutes before, she had clung desperately to her twin babies, but these had been torn from her by the crown bailiff. At the summit a stake had been driven in the ground and around it wood had been piled. As she knelt, chains were wrapped around her body and in less than an hour ashes was all that remained of Eufame MacLayne. This execution was not the result of mob violence, for the victim had been tried by due process of law and had been convicted. Evidence was advanced which proved that she had employed a midwife, "one Agnes Sampson to administer unto her a certain medicine for the relief of pain in childbirth contrary to divine law and in contempt of the crown."
>
> Eufame MacLayne's fate had been sealed by precedent. Convention had made it an insult to the Deity to assist a woman in labor. This was a crime which always drew the extreme penalty in medieval Europe. In 1521 Viethes, a Hamburg physician was arrested for attempting to mitigate the pains of labor. By nature Viethes was generous and kind, and his patient, a frail woman, begged for relief. Her entreaties reached the heart of this good man and he complied with her request. Immediately the wheels of the law began to turn and a conviction was soon obtained for the crown. A few weeks later an unusual light shone one night over Hamburg. They were burning Dr. Viethes.

[367]Ibid., 122-125. See also Andrew D. White, Ibid., 62, 63.

[368]See Monica Winefryde Furlong, "Anesthesia," in Microsoft ® Encarta ® Encyclopedia 2003 (CD Deluxe). © 1993-2002 Microsoft Corporation.

[369]Seeman, *Man Against Pain*, 122.

so-called enlightened and intelligent. Newspapers, magazines and pamphlets joined to loose their arrows at him."[370] **Andrew White** (1832-1918), U.S. diplomat, author, educator, and founder of Cornell University, wrote:

> From pulpit after pulpit Simpson's use of chloroform was denounced as impious and contrary to Holy Writ; texts were cited abundantly, the ordinary declaration being that to use chloroform was "to avoid one part of the primeval curse on woman." Simpson wrote pamphlet after pamphlet to defend the blessing which he brought into use; but he seemed about to be overcome, when he seized a new weapon, probably the most absurd by which a great cause was ever won: "My opponents forget," he said, "the twenty-first verse of the second chapter of Genesis; it is the record of the first surgical operation ever performed, and that text proves that the Maker of the universe, before he took the rib from Adam's side for the creation of Eve, caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam."[371]

Why was there such a vivacious attack against this Professor of Obstetrics at the University of Glasgow, Scotland? Seeman says, "At the core of the attacks was the belief that the use of anesthesia in labor was an attempt to contravene the decrees of Providence, hence reprehensible and heretical."[372] Numerous individuals objected to anesthesia in labor for childbirth as an attempt to circumvent the Genesis mandate: "with pain you will give birth to children" (Genesis 3:16). Since Dr. Simpson was well versed in logic and theology, he examined the objections on religious as well as scientific grounds. In his defense, he exposed his critics with the following words:

> Were the curse in Genesis to be accepted literally, as the defenders of pain were doing, then a man sinned each time he eased his labor by using an ox, a plow or even fertilizer to enrich the soil. Any labor-saving device was as much in contravention of the Lord's curse as pain-saving anesthetic.[373]

Boyer

We must exercise caution that we do not isolate a passage from its context. Boyer, early in the nineteenth century, presented inoculation as a preventive of small pox in France. Not long after this introduction of vaccination, theologians were soon finding reasons against the innovative practice. Rev. Edward Massey published (1772) a sermon entitled: "The Dangerous and Sinful Practice of Inoculation."[374] The Theologians argued that the disease of smallpox, as well as other diseases, was "sent by Providence for the punishment of sin; and the proposed attempt to prevent them is 'a diabolical operation.'"[375] Another preacher, Rev. Mr. Delafaye, also preached a sermon with the title: "Inoculation and Indefensible Practice."[376] White writes: "The same opposition was vigorous in Protestant Scotland. A large body of ministers joined in denouncing the new practice as 'flying in the face of Providence,' and 'endeavoring to baffle a Divine judgment.'"[377]

Another physician, Dr. Zabdiel Boylston (1676/79-1766), medical doctor, in 1721, inoculated his son. As a result of this experiment, he encountered bitter hostility. Another physician, Dr. Douglas, a Scotch, insisted that inoculation was "poisoning." The opposing party urged the authorities to try Dr. Boylston for murder. Again, White discloses the inner thoughts of the radicals: "That the smallpox is 'a judgment of God on the sins of the people,' and that 'to avert it is but to provoke him more'; that inoculation is 'an encroachment on the prerogatives of Jehovah, whose right it is to wound and smite.'"[378]

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[370]Ibid., 123, 124.

[371]Andrew White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom*, Vol., 2 (New York: George Braziller, 1955), 63.

[372]Ibid., 123.

[373]Ibid., 125.

[374]Ibid., 55.

[375]Ibid.

[376]Ibid., 55, 56.

[377]Ibid., 56.

[378]Ibid.

Many Scriptures were employed to bolster their claims against smallpox and inoculations. In their arsenal of isolated Scriptures, they also cited Hosea 6:1 to justify their negative reaction, which reads: "He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds." This Scripture was torn out of its context to give credence to their presuppositions founded upon an illegal use of Scripture. They used this Scripture as their means of justification against using means of healing for any disease, not just smallpox.[379]

How did they prove their presuppositions? By isolating Scriptures from their context, they were able to prove to the masses that they were right. In the evolution of medicine, we also encounter's Edward Jenner's (1749-1823), English scientist and doctor, discovery of vaccination. One of his professional colleagues, Dr. Moseley, in opposition to vaccination, wrote a title page for his book: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."[380] In 1798 physicians and clergymen sought to suppress vaccination as "bidding defiance to Heaven itself, even to the will of God" by forming an Anti-vaccination Society.[381] But eventually right reason gained the day.

Dr. Ignatz Philipp Semmelweis

Dr. Semmelweis (1818-1865), a young Hungarian physician, went to Vienna (1848) for advanced studies in obstetrics. This hospital provided him with firsthand studies dealing with childbirth. This hospital frequently put new cases into the beds of those who had just died with the "Childbed Fever" without changing the bedding. He soon discovered that one out of every ten births left the baby motherless. Many reasons were associated with the sudden death of the mothers. One physician, Meigs of Philadelphia, one of the greatest obstetricians of his time, attributed the deaths to "Justification of Providence; a judgment instituted to remind us of the sin committed by the mother of the race."[382] Dr. Semmelweis performed post-mortems to try to determine the cause of death. But this resulted in no visible means of determining the cause of death.

He left Vienna and went to Venice as a discouraged, overworked, and nervous individual. A few weeks later, he returned to Vienna and discovered doctors performing an autopsy on the body of Dr. Kolletschka, who had just died from septicemia (invasion of the blood-stream by virulent microorganisms—blood poisoning) as a result of a wound he had received in the dissecting room. This triggered his memory in the recall of deaths that were much higher in one section of the hospital than another over which the midwives were delivering babies. As he reflected upon this problem, he then realized that the doctors who performed autopsies left the dissected bodies to deliver babies without washing their hands. As a result of this discovery, he had all his students to wash their hands with a solution of chloride of calcium before delivery. The death rate plummeted. Thus, this discovery transformed a theory into fact.

As a result of this find, he wrote a book, *The Cause, Concept, and Prophylaxis of Puerperal Fever*, "a work that would one day revolutionize the science of obstetrics."[383] Since his findings did not coincide with the traditional ideas, he was persecuted. In Austria, he was bitterly opposed by two individuals—Scanzoni and Carl Braun—along with leading obstetricians. As stated above, many physicians contributed the childbed fever to "bad ventilation, to bad water, to improper food, and to disordered psychic states. Yet, by the older and more devout physicians it was thought to be the result of the Edenic curse."[384] The "Edenic curse" would be Genesis 3:16. During the early part of 1865, the criticism became so severe that Dr. Semmelweis became insane. Physical disease set in and in November he died. Did he die for nothing? No! Later, the work that he did laid the groundwork for "Pasteur's discovery of the role played by microorganisms in the production of fermentation."[385] Later, the renowned surgeon, Joseph Lister (1827-1912, English surgeon and father of modern surgery, saw the principle of antiseptic surgery initiated by Dr. Semmelweis and proclaimed Semmelweis as his

[379]Ibid.
[380]Ibid., 58.
[381]Ibid.
[382]Donald T. Atkinson, *Magic, Myth and Medicine*, 274.
[383]Ibid., 276.
[384]Ibid., 274.
[385]Ibid., 277.

forerunner.[386] Once more, we can see the devastating effects of one's misuse of the Bible; it wreaks havoc upon God's creation.

Jesus' Confrontation with Satan

A classic example of context is Jesus' confrontation with Satan. Scripture citations came from both Satan and Jesus. Matthew's record of Jesus' encounter with Satan in the wilderness is a masterpiece of how not to interpret Scripture and how to interpret Scripture. It is one thing to quote Scripture and another thing to give the intent of the passage. Matthew's account reveals Satan citing Psalm 91:11-12 to Jesus in order to bolster his claim that Jesus could jump from "the highest point of the temple" (Matthew 4:5). Satan quoted the Scriptures accurately, but he did not look at the intent. Jesus also cited another Scripture to Satan to demonstrate that he had incorrectly interpreted this section of the Psalm. Jesus cited Deuteronomy 6:16 to illustrate that one cannot pit one Scripture against another Scripture. The following chart sets forth Psalm 91:11-12 and Satan's citation of Psalm 91:11-12 in Matthew 4:6:

Psalm 91:11-12	Matthew 4:6
For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; [12] they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.	For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone. [b]"

Give to One Who Asks

Another example from the Sermon on the Mount should help to drive home the necessity of context before building one's theology upon an isolated passage. Should we interpret Matthew 5:42 literally? Jesus says, "give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you" (5:42). Can we utilize discretion in giving money to others who ask? How many Christians interpret this passage literally? Did Paul contradict Jesus when he wrote the following to the Thessalonians: "For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: 'If a man will not work, he shall not eat'" (1 Thessalonians 3:10)?

Again, how should we interpret the following words: "But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matthew 5:39)? Does God expect us to interpret this literally? If someone should hit you in the head with a baseball bat, does God expect you to stand up—provided it does not kill you—and say, "Well, hit me on the other side"? The reason for stressing these matters is to call attention to the necessity of interpreting according to meaning.[387] Understanding of these principles of interpretation should also help one to discard so much tradition placed upon 1 Timothy 2:9-15.

Amos 6:5 versus 2 Chronicles 29:25

Another illustration of how some Christians misapply a Scripture in order to maintain their disapproving views toward the use of instruments in the corporate praise assembly is found in Amos 6:5. This Scripture is applied by many believers to prove that God did not approve of David's command to use instruments of music in praise to God.[388] I, too, cited Amos 6:5 the first seventeen years of my ministry to prove that God condemned

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[386]Ibid.

b Psalm 91:11,12

[387]For examples of hyperbole (bold exaggeration for emphasis), see Chapter 8 ("Divorce Sayings in the Synoptics") in this book (pp. 150-188).

[388]See Goebel Music, "The New Testament Commands Us to Use Old Testament Psalms," *The Spiritual Sword* 10, no. 1 (October 1978): 22-27.

David for introducing instrumental music into the Old Testament worship. I had to revise my earlier position—a position that I was taught as a teenager—when I discovered a passage in which God commanded David to use instruments. I then recognized that whatever Amos was saying, he could not be saying what I said he said. The following chart should put this misapplication in proper perspective:

2 Chronicles 29:25	Amos 6:5
He stationed the Levites in the temple of the LORD with cymbals, harps and lyres in the way prescribed by David and Gad the king's seer and Nathan the prophet; this was commanded by the LORD through his prophets.	You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments

If we employ Amos 6:5 to condemn the use of instruments, we fail to take into consideration the context of this passage. We cannot nullify 2 Chronicles 29:25 with Amos 6:5. To do so is to violate God's Word. Kevin Giles, vicar of St. Michael's Church, North Carlton, Australia, warns about an invalid approach to the study of Scriptures with comments about 1 Timothy 2:9-15:

> Making 1 Tim. 2:9-15 the key to understanding what the Scriptures teach about women and the narrow lens through which the whole Bible is read on this matter distorts the overall picture. It is not a valid methodological approach. Parallels would be to make James 2:18-26 the focal point to begin working out a doctrine of justification, or Revelation 10:1-10 the commencement point for a study of eschatology, or Acts 8:4-25 the foundation for a theology of Spirit reception. To capture the overall drift of Scripture on any matter we need to listen to the whole, and take into account the passages of Scripture those with whom we differ think are important. The history of the church tells us that when this is not done Christians invariably fall into theological error. Indeed, the late Oscar Cullmann [1902-1999] argued that 'the fountain head of all false Bible interpretation and all heresy is invariably the isolation and absolutising of one single passage.'[389]

CONCLUSION

As we approach the interpretation of any text, we should never attack the sincerity of those who follow a path that is not in keeping with the context—many of whom are no doubt good and godly men and women—but there is still a need to guard against an interpretation that does not ring true to the biblical Revelation itself. When we, as interpreters, seek to understand the part (isolated text), we must first seek to understand the whole (the entire book). In the study of 1 Timothy 2:9-15, we should study the background of the Pastoral Epistles (First Timothy, Second Timothy, and Titus) before we undertake to understand the particulars. Since 1 Timothy 2:9-15 is a part of a larger narrative, it seems that the reader should interpret this isolated text in light of the overall meaning of the book itself. Also, it is safe to say that a search for the theme of the book should go a long way to a proper understanding of the text in dispute. Robert Stein correctly says, "The way an author helps his readers understand the meaning he seeks to convey is through context."[390]

As we seek to find an answer to the meaning behind 1 Timothy 2:9-15, we must always be conscious that our prejudice(s) can be so deep-seated that, in effect, a verdict is passed even before the evidence (the whole book) is considered. This mindset results in the impossibility of understanding the text. Yet again, the words of Kevin Giles are to the point about looking for an overall theme in the interpretation of any passage:

> The prohibition on women's exercising authority and teaching in church in 1 Timothy 2:11-12 is addressed to a particular situation. This text is to be understood against the backdrop of false teaching that had erupted in Ephesus, which

[389]Kevin Giles, "A Critique of the 'Novel' Contemporary Interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:9-15 Given in the Book, Women in the Church. Part II," *The Evangelical Quarterly* LXXII, no. 3 (July 2000): 207.

[390]Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 57.

had led both men and women astray. Women had been allowed to teach in church, since Paul first founded the church several years previously, but now he forbids them from doing so.[391]

The next chapter explores another text that needs to be looked at through new eyes. Romans 16:17 is in the arsenal of many Christian men and women, which Scripture, to many, justifies separation from other devout and sincere Christians.

[391]Kevin Giles, *The Trinity & Subordinationism: The Doctrine of God & the Contemporary Gender Debate* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity, 2002), 206, 207.

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Watch Out for Those Who Cause Divisions

> The exegete who is doing his or her work properly is forever asking the question: But what is the point? What is the author driving at? That is, one is always raising the question of the author's intent. . . . Further, one is also wary [cautious] of over-exegeting—for example, finding something that would stagger the author were he informed someone had found it in his writing, or building a theology upon the use of . . . discovering meaning in what was not said.[392]

Romans 16:17 flashes like neon lights through many religious journals. One of Paul's statements toward the close of his Epistle is one of the most abused Scriptures within Christendom by many sincere Christians. "Contrary to the teaching you have learned" is cited by many Christians to advocate their own particular interpretation of God's Word. Whatever they learned from the church fathers just happens to be what Paul writes about. I, too, misused this Scripture during the early part of my ministry (seventeen years) to justify separation from other sincere godly men and women who did not agree with my particular interpretation of certain Scriptures, especially those concerned with my concept of the so-called five acts (rituals) performed during a public worship service. This controversial passage concludes Paul's Epistle to the Romans. He writes with this intense warning: "I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them" (Romans 16:17).

This chapter is not designed to castigate Christians who misapply this Scripture, but rather to shed light upon the true meaning of Paul's words. This passage is frequently employed in order to justify disconnection from other believers who do not fall in-line with the so-called faithful brothers. Unfortunately, many believers latch onto this verse as their own unique property. Since Christianity is divided into many splinter groups, each unique fellowship wallops other groups not in line with their thinking. This statement of Paul is called forth by many sincere and godly men and women in order to demonstrate to the church and to the world that they will not tolerate dissent from the status quo.

Since I grew up in the one-cup and non-Sunday school segment of the Churches of Christ, I am well acquainted with battles of at least one hundred and fifty years of tradition.[393] Many within this movement (Churches of Christ in general) are so imbued with their own particular splinter group's understanding that they can no longer distinguish between their customs and the Word of God. Yet, this mindset is not restricted to this fellowship of believers, but rather it crosses all denominational lines. Regrettably, many of God's children cannot distinguish between their interpretation of God's Word and Holy Scripture. Jesus, too, confronted this

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[392]Gordon D. Fee, *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1991), 17.

[393]Some of the mostly godly men and women that I have ever known are associated with the one-cup and non-Sunday school fellowship of God's people. When I write about this movement or the Churches of Christ in general, I am not questioning their honesty and dedication to God, but rather I am trying to help these believers in Christ to come to a clearer understanding of God's Word.

same scenario of long-held traditions when He arrived on the scene to begin His ministry of announcing Himself as God's Good News for the salvation of lost humanity.

As Jesus began His preaching and teaching ministry, He, too, confronted at least one hundred and fifty years of beliefs as advanced by the religious leaders. They, like so many of us, could not differentiate between their practice and the Word of God itself. Even today, there are many traditions that exist within God's family that are still associated with the Word. This in-depth study is concerned with believers who wrench this Scripture out of context to support their castigation, or chastisement, of other saints. Having said this, I do not believe this misapplication is done with the intent to violate God's Word. This misapplication, or treatment, is primarily a hand-me-down teaching, which goes all the way back to the beginning of the Protestant Reformation Movement.

Just how should we interpret Romans 16:17? How should we explain this passage? To interpret this text correctly, we must again consult the *immediate* context. In other words, the ***immediate context*** would include Chapters 14 and 15. Just a cursory reading of the context indicates that Paul is writing about the spirit of toleration for differences within the Christian community. If individuals insist on their way or "hit the highway," then Paul says, keep your eyes on that person. As we approach this much-abused text, we need to inquire as to the meaning of Paul words: "watch out for those" (**σκοπεῖν τοὺς**, *skopein tous*). Paul did not indicate by this Greek word that Christians are to hack to death with a meat-cleaver anyone who dares to disagree with another believer. One objective of this chapter is to encourage Christians to look at this old text through new eyes.

What did Paul intend to convey by the phrase "watch out for the ones" in this context? The KJV translates the Greek word *skopein* as *mark*, and this rendition is frequently relied upon by various fellowships in order to give credence to disassociate themselves from the so-called unfaithful. Unhappily, many Christians are thrown out of the synagogues through a misapplication of Paul's instructions. In order to arrive at a correct interpretation of Paul's admonition, we need to go to the *immediate context*. It is wrong for believers to employ this Scripture to rationalize their actions of condemnation for those who fail to adhere to a particular interpretation.

I began my ministry within the one-cup and non-Sunday school movement, which movement consists of men and women who try to be true to the Word of God. Nevertheless, this Scripture is one of the first verses that I memorized. My first sermon utilized this citation from Paul to condemn other Churches of Christ for deviating from our practice. Today, we still witness some Churches of Christ citing this verse against those who participate in Sunday school, individual communion cups, Bible colleges, bread-breaking, bread-pinching, wine, grape juice, acapella music, instrumental music, and so on. On the other hand, many within the other denominational Churches of Christ also twist this Scripture to condemn anyone who does not tow-the-line as understood by themselves.

Whether one uses individual cups in the communion or one cup, both groups employ this same Scripture to justify departure from others who do not agree with their particular interpretation of God's Word on various issues. Both groups will cite Romans 16:17 to lambaste the other group with the epithet: "Division Makers." This legitimate statement of Paul is utilized to force subjection to a meticulous brand of orthodoxy. And those who do not conform to the traditional views advanced by a hard-to-please interpretative community are disenfranchised from their fellowship.

TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATION OF ROMANS 16:17

This study is an analysis of the traditional understanding of Romans 16:17 as well as an exegesis of the real intent of the statement by Paul. Unless one remembers that godly teachers have simply passed much of their theology on to them, then it is much more difficult to see the text as a window through which we can peer into the historical period. The inherited commentary on Romans 16:17 is employed by many Christians to explain away their behavior of alienation from other believers. The traditional position, so it appears, is based on a series of unverifiable arguments, which in turn function as assumptions, to the effect that the reading of the

text is upon the basis of one's own theological urgencies, not upon Paul's intended meaning. This "handed-down" view is associated with Dub McClish, allied with one of the most conservative elements within the Churches of Christ, in The Eighth Annual Spiritual Sword Lectureship. McClish asserts:

> This passage emphasizes the dependence of true unity upon doctrine. The concept of the possibility of scriptural unity on any basis that ignores or forfeits doctrinal truth must be rejected. There can be no heaven-oriented unity in the climate of doctrinal diversity. Scriptural unity surely involves mutual love between the parties concerned, but it requires far more than mere love. This passage states it plainly: where doctrines that differ from and are contrary to THE DOCTRINE are taught and received, the result is not unity, but "*divisions and occasions of stumbling.*" Such statements as "*It is not doctrine that unites us, it is love*," are not only unscriptural, they are totally anti-scriptural. The content of Romans 16:17 alone is sufficient to successfully challenge the insidious Ketcherside-Garrett doctrine of "*unity in diversity.*"[394]

The phrase—"doctrine"—as employed by McClish is in essence whatever he believes about certain Church of Christ dogma. Each fellowship—approximately twenty-five in number—interprets "doctrine" or "teaching" differently. The various orthodox bodies can never agree on what the "teaching" is that Paul addresses in this epistle to Rome. In this same vein of reasoning, Homer L. King (1892-1983), former editor of *Old Paths Advocate*, wrote an article in 1936 to condemn men like McClish for not abiding in "the teaching [**τὴν διδαχὴν**, *tēn didachēn*] you have learned" (Romans 16:17).[395] King wrote an article to justify his separation from Christians who use individual communion cups in the communion and participate in Sunday school. I personally knew this man, and he was, in my judgment, a great Christian man. He, like so many others, failed to examine the context. This chapter is a call to all God's people to reread this old text and view through new eyes.

King entitled his article, "Avoid Them." This heading is taken from the concluding remarks of Paul in this passage: "Keep away from them." With his mental concept of what it was all about, he had no choice other than to promote rejection of other believers who refused to conform to his beliefs associated with the one-cup and non-Sunday school persuasion. What had King learned from his misguided teachers? He learned that he should not use individual cups nor participate in Bible study classes for various ages. I, too, misapplied this Scripture for seventeen years until I learned to read in context. My uncle, E. H. Miller (1909-1989), taught me the traditional interpretation, which understanding is all he knew. His misunderstanding was not rebellion against God, but rather it was simply an honest mistake of the heart.

This essay by King had such an impact upon this movement that the current editor, his son (Don), republished this article forty-six years later (February 1982) and again in January 1992. The *Old Paths Advocate* (*OPA*) still uses the logic of King in their interpretation of Romans 16:17. This Scripture is called forth by the *OPA* fellowship to condemn men like McClish, but, on the other hand, McClish employs this same Scripture to clobber men like Carl Ketcherside (1908-1989) and Leroy Garrett (b. 1918). Again, as cited above, McClish says, "Romans 16:17 alone is sufficient to successfully challenge the insidious Ketcherside-Garrett doctrine of '*unity in diversity*'."

McClish and King, even though in different religious parties or interpretative communities within the Churches of Christ, employed this same Scripture with the same devastating result against those who would dare to differ with their own unique interpretative community. King's sectarian spirit, though not intentional, also comes through loud and clear as he "hauls over the coals" those with whom he disagrees:

> "What shall I do," some one inquires, "when we have a preacher or teacher present, who is not quite sound?" Let him be a good listener, until, if ever, he declares his loyalty. The same is true of those, whom you do not know. "They will not

[394]Dub McClish, "Greetings—Along With A Warning—To Those In Rome (Rom. 16:1-20)" in *The Book of Romans: The Eighth Annual Spiritual Sword Lectureship* (Ark: National Christian Press, 1983), 244. Even though I have never met Dub McClish, I still regard him as a child of God. He, like so many of us, is still bound to the traditions handed down to him by the church fathers. This chapter is designed to call attention to the need to reexamine old texts through new eyes.

[395]Homer L. King, "AVOID THEM," *Old Paths Advocate* 54, no. 2, reprint (February 1, 1982), 5. I do not believe his misapplication was rebellion against God, but rather it was simply an honest mistake of the heart and intellect.

> say anything about our differences in their teaching," says one. How do you know? If not publicly, they will privately, and beside you are not obeying the command given by Paul, viz, "'mark them' . . . and 'avoid them'" (Rom. 16:17. Homer L. King, OPA, Sept. 1, 1936.[396]

The above two citations from both McClish and King illustrate the dilemma Christians find themselves involved in when they disagree with other believers over doctrinal issues. As we peruse the various religious journals, we quickly discover "editor bishops" and "powerful preachers" lashing out at one another with Romans 16:17 in their arsenal of warfare Scriptures. McClish, as stated above, denounces what he calls "the insidious Ketcherside-Garrett doctrine of '*unity in diversity*.'" But what is there about this *unity in diversity* practice that is so abhorrent to him and to many other religious teachers?[397] This practice of accepting others with various viewpoints, according to McClish and King, is tantamount to denying that the Bible is the standard of authority. And, as a result of this perception of unity, the wrath of many godly men and women fall upon the necks of the dissidents who are equally godly in their walk with the Lord.

Again, what is this "insidious doctrine" advanced by the late Carl Ketcherside and the contemporary Leroy Garrett? It is the philosophy of the spirit of toleration for differences within the Christian community (church). Both Ketcherside and Garrett rejected the traditional interpretation, which interpretation wrought havoc within God's church. Both men called for toleration, or acceptance, in order to bring praise to God, which praise could only be achieved through the unity of the Sprit. On the other hand, McClish employed Romans 16:17 to condemn Ketcherside and Garrett and, with this Scripture, justified his right to "avoid" them.

Upon closer examination of the context of Romans 16:17, we soon discover that the arguments advanced by McClish as well as King do not hold up under closer scrutiny. Christians seldom ask, what does the text mean? For us to assign a meaning to the text that was not in the original meaning is to abuse the text. Both men, unconsciously, have distorted the text from its intended meaning. This falsification of this text, so it seems to me, does not appear to be deliberate on the part of either person. As interpreters of God's Word, we must never forget that every Christian is confronted daily with his theological heritage, his ecclesiastical traditions, his cultural norms, and his existential concerns.[398] Both Ketcherside and Garrett sensed this aspect of human nature, and, as a result of this realization, they published books under the following titles: *The Twisted Scriptures*[399] and *The Word Abused*.[400]

CARL KETCHERSIDE'S VIEW ON UNITY

Just what did Ketcherside teach about how we maintain a relationship with God? What did he teach concerning *unity in diversity*, which we all practice—whether mindful or unaware of such behavior? To be fair to Ketcherside, it seems only appropriate to let him express his own thoughts through his own writings. After a perusal, or examination, of his thoughts on unity, we can more fully grasp either the correctness or incorrectness of McClish's allegations about the so-called "insidious doctrine." Ketcherside understood that a mistake of the mind was not necessarily a result of a dishonest heart. In other words, we can be honestly mistaken, but still be loved by God at the same time (see also 1 Corinthians 8 for a biblical example of how one can be mistaken and still be loved by God).

Ketcherside goes right to the heart of the matter when he expresses his views about a misunderstanding of the text: "Men can be mistaken without being malicious. They can fail to comprehend without falling away from Jesus."[401] Again, Ketcherside (1908-1989) correctly points out: "One who loves the Lord Jesus Christ is

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[396]See Homer L. King, "AVOID THEM," *Old Paths Advocate* 54, no. 2, reprint (February 1, 1982), 5.

[397]For an in-depth study of unity in diversity, see chapter 6 ("Unity in Diversity" in this book (*Old Texts through New Eyes*), pp. 119-130

[398]See Gordon D Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* : A Guide to Understanding the Bible (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 57-71, for an excellent chapter on hermeneutical questions dealing with context and culture.

[399]Carl Ketcherside, *The Twisted Scriptures* (St. Louis: Mission Messenger, 1965; reprint, DeFuniak Springs, FL: Diversity Press, 1992).

[400]Leroy Garrett, *The Word Abused* (Texas: Leroy Garrett, 1975).

[401]Carl Ketcherside, "Analysis of Apostasy," *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 4 (April 1965): 51.

not an apostate simply because he cannot conscientiously concur with the orthodox position of a party."[402] Once more, he uses the following pregnant words to express the futility of advocating unity based upon conformity: "Any attempt to secure unity upon the basis of uniformity of knowledge or conformity in deductive or inferential processes (i.e., doctrinal interpretation) is doomed before it begins."[403]

This abnormal interpretation of Romans 16:17 is not just unique to McClish and King. This text is cited by many well-meaning Christians to castigate those who advance the belief of *unity in diversity* and, at the same time, to turn down fellowship with individuals who advocate that freedom from error is not a condition of salvation. Ketcherside sought to lay bare the text itself from traditions and sets forth his reason for espousing *unity in diversity* as the only reasonable position that anyone can champion without going contrary to the Word of God and common sense. Note for instance his following explanation for his belief in *unity in diversity*:

> Freedom from error is not a condition of salvation else all men would be damned. We are not saved by attainment to a certain degree of knowledge but by faith in Christ Jesus. It is by belief of facts related to him, and not by grasp of abstract truth, that we are justified before God. Certainly it is not by performance of meritorious deeds nor by legalistic conformity. When we postulate a program of justification by knowledge we hang ourselves on the gallows we have constructed to rid ourselves of others, unless we are prepared to make ourselves even more ridiculous by affirming that we know as much as God.[404]

Has God made salvation contingent upon absolute perfection in knowledge? An answer to this question is an unqualified "NO"! Eternal life is not conditioned upon an all-out mastery of the written Word of God. Does Christian unity call for unqualified perfection in knowledge of the Holy Scriptures? Again, the answer to this question must be "NO." The only kind of unity that individuals can share is *unity in diversity*. If pure understanding is essential to eternal life, no one could be saved. It is obvious to the thinking mind that within the Christian community there are babes, children, young men, and fathers in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Not only did Ketcherside see the foolishness of trying to make unity conditioned upon an out-and-out conformity, but, at the same time, one hundred and thirty years earlier, **Alexander Campbell (1788-1866), one of the founders of the Disciples of Christ, also dealt with the absurdity of thinking that unity could be based on anything other than faith in Jesus.** Campbell strips away all the extraneous matter and goes right to the heart of the problem of disunity among God's people. Consider the following penetrating analysis of unity as Campbell paints, with words, the predicament of modern men and women who wish to make opinion the basis of unity rather than the Gospel facts:

> Let every sect give up its opinions as a bond of union, and what will remain in common? The gospel facts alone. . . . Men have foolishly attempted to make the deductions of some great minds the common measure of all Christians. . . . It is cruel to excommunicate a man because of the imbecility of his intellect. I have been censured long and often for laying too much stress upon the assent of the understanding; but those who have most acrimoniously censured me, have laid much more stress upon the assent of the mind than I have ever done. I never did, at any time, exclude a man from the kingdom of God for a mere imbecility of intellect; or, in other words, because he could not assent to my opinions. . . . I will now show how they cannot make a sect of us. We will acknowledge all as Christians who acknowledge the gospel facts, and obey Jesus Christ.[405]

Campbell knew that it is redemption "in" and "through" Christ that makes us one, not correct understanding. He refused to eliminate a man from the kingdom of God for a condition of mental deficiency or feeble-mindedness. He accepted all as Christians who acknowledged the Death, Burial, and Resurrection of

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[402]Ibid.

[403]Carl Ketcherside, "Gospel and Doctrine," *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 2 (February 1965): 18.

[404]Ibid., 7.

[405]Alexander Campbell, "Millennium. No. II," *The Millennial Harbinger* 1, no. 4 (April 5, 1830): 13, 14. In spite of Campbell's desire to promote unity among the various denominations, his movement eventually developed into three distinctive movements: Disciples of Christ, Christian Churches, and the Churches of Christ. Each of these movements has divided into numerous factions.

Jesus, and who also submitted their lives to Him in conformity to His ethical standards as set forth in the Sermon on the Mount.

LEROY GARRETT POSTULATES UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Leroy Garrett (1918-2015), a Reformer and author within the Churches of Christ, expresses well the basic problem interpreters encounter by not applying Romans 16:17 to *unity in diversity*, which is exactly what Paul is teaching. The "teaching" in this passage deals with the spirit of toleration for differences within the Christian community, not doctrinal conformity before unity. Garrett, too, captures the essence of Paul's admonition to the Romans, when he writes: "The phrase 'contrary to the teachings you received' almost certainly refers to the teaching on *unity in spite of differences* which he had just laid before them in the letter, especially Ro. 14."[406]

Again, Garrett seems to be right in thinking that "It is clear enough that he is dealing with a behavioral problem more than a doctrinal one."[407] Paul is not saying, "It is my way or no way." The traditional Church of Christ interpretation is the spirit of "no toleration" for differences. This behavior is totally at odds with the context. McClish and King, as mentioned above, deny that Paul is teaching *unity in diversity*. "Unity in diversity" is what McClish calls "insidious Ketcherside-Garrett doctrine. Yet, this *unity in diversity* is the same teaching expounded by Paul in his first letter to Corinth (1 Corinthians 8) and to Rome (Romans 14-16). If Paul were here today, he would be rejected on the theological positions of McClish and King.

The practice of excommunicating individuals that dissent from one's assumptions is not new to the Christian world of Don McClish or the late Homer King. This same mindset is also found in the fourteen century. For example, **John Wycliffe** (1330-84), English theologian, translator and reformist, suffered abuse from the church for disagreeing with certain religious practices and beliefs. In the sixteen century, **John Knox** (1514-1572), Scottish clergy and leader of the Protestant Reformation, spent nineteen months as a galley slave for his faith. Then in the seventeen century, **John Bunyan** (1628-1688), Christian writer and preacher, spent twelve years in prison (1660-1672) for refusing to apply for a license to preach. And, but not least, in the sixteenth century, **William Tyndale** (1494-1536), Bible translator and Christian Martyr, was burnt for so-called heresy. What was his heresy? He translated the Bible from Greek into English.[408]

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[406]Leroy Garrett, "Mark Them Which Cause Divisions," *Restoration Review* 17, no. 1 (February 1975): 25.

[407]Ibid., 24.

[408]For earlier views and reactions toward the dissent, see John Foxe, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, reprint, 1980). Formerly this book was entitled *The Acts and Monuments,* first published on March 20, 1563. In his day executions occurred on a regular basis for holding different opinions from the established church. In the "Biographical Sketch," one senses the concern of Foxe for the intolerable condition in his day, page xii:

> In 1575 Foxe energetically sought to obtain the remission of the capital sentence in the case of two Dutch Anabaptists condemned to the stake for their opinions. He wrote to the Queen, Lord Burghley, and Lord Chief Justice Manson, pointing out the disproportion between the offence and the punishment, and deprecating the penalty of death in cases of heresy. A respite of a month was allowed, but both the Anabaptists perished.

See also Jock Purvis, *Fair Sunshine: Character Studies of the Scottish Covenanters* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982). This book is an outline on Scottish Covenant History in the 17th century. The atrocities committed against believers because they refused to conform to the established church are appalling. This book is sufficient to set the tone for the horrors perpetrated against other believers; it is mind-boggling; the following citation makes one shudder (page 69):

> The year 1685 was a terrible year in a terrible era. The Killing Time reeked reddest then, The author of Robinson Crusoe, Daniel Defoe, one of the most painstaking and sympathetic writers on the Covenanter, 'fixes on the barbarities of this year to support his opinion that the Scottish persecution was worse than that of the Roman Emperors and Popish Inquisitors.'

ALEXANDER CAMPBELL PUTS FORWARD UNITY IN DIVERSITY

One hundred and seventy-six years ago (1832), Alexander Campbell (1788-1866) confronted a religious movement that was split into many warring factions. None could agree on what was essential and what was non-essential for Christian unity among the various denominations. Christians, in his day, as well as our day, sought to make fellowship conditional upon unanimity of agreement upon doctrinal matters. As a result of this kind of mental gymnastics, he observed division on every street corner. He saw Christians throwing one another out of the synagogue because of differences over how to interpret a passage of Scripture.

Romans 16:17 was tossed about in his day as it is presently hurled about in our day. Thus, Alexander Campbell, too, dealt with the misapplication of this passage that was utilized to justify separation, or disconnection, from other equally God-fearing and sincere followers of Jesus. The amount of space and time taken here to review this particular controversy—*unity in diversity*—although considerable, is easily justified. The following quote from Campbell is a lengthy passage, but it has to be cited in full to appreciate his mature insight—an insight that many today do not possess. Campbell's words are pertinent and relevant for the Christian community that has turned into a war zone.

> The Pope and his angels preached from this text half a century, while Luther, Zwingli, Melanchthon, &c. were exposing the filthiness of the Mother of Harlots. As Luther gave the Pope no quarters, he wreaked his vengeance on the Reformers, denouncing them as heretics, schismatics, sowers of discord among brethren, haughty, self-willed, and contumacious[409] dignitaries.
>
> He learned that lesson from his predecessors, who denounced the Messiah and his Apostles by similar arguments. Jesus was not a good man, for he made division among the people; and the Apostles were heresiarchs,[410] for they turned the world upside down.
>
> Elijah, too, was a disturber of the peace of Israel; and Daniel greatly marred the harmony of the devout fraternity who paid court to Nebuchadnezzar. In short, from the time that Moses caused divisions in the kingdom of Pharaoh, down to the last Dover Association, this text, "Mark and avoid them that cause divisions," has never been unseasonable amongst the opponents of reform and of change; for as there can be no reformation without change—and as all who preach reformation preach a change, the consequence must be, that those who will not change, must, to justify themselves, denounce the reformers; and no text does this better than this—"*Mark them which cause divisions, and avoid them*."[411]

Christians still herald this text against anyone who seeks to call attention to a reevaluation of one hundred and fifty years of tradition. Just a perusal of the Church of Christ journals reveals the popularity of this text (Romans 16:17). If anyone questions the hand-me-down traditions from the forefathers, we hear the epithet—"Division Makers." Campbell correctly called attention to an illegal use of this citation to condemn the Reformers who sought to bring about change. The religious leaders in Jesus' day could also have quoted this Scripture against Jesus and His apostles. Why? Jesus and His apostles challenged the traditions of the Pharisees and the teachers of the Law. They were in modern parlance "change-agents."

TOLERATION AND FORBEARANCE ARE ESSENTIAL FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

Two reformers—Carl Ketcherside (1908-1989) and Leroy Garrett (1918-2015)—questioned the traditions of the Churches of Christ and their proof-texting of Scripture to substantiate their divisive spirit. One such Scripture they sought to put back into context dealt with Romans 16:17. This passage was used and is still

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[409]Stubbornly or willfully disobedient to authority: Rebellious.

[410]The founder of a heresy or the leader of a heretical sect; an originator or chief advocate of a heresy.

[411]Alexander Campbell, "Mark Them Who Cause Division," *Millennial Harbinger* 3 (5 November 1832"): 604. Underling of this text is mine (RDB).

used to hack to death anyone who dared/dares to question the strange and weird interpretations of a distinctive interpretative community. They knew that this abnormal interpretation attached to Romans 16:17 violated the general teachings of the New Testament (Ephesians 4:1-6) and the unity for which Jesus prayed in His priestly prayer (John 17).

Both Garrett and Ketcherside called for forbearance. This spirit of toleration for mental deficiency in God's Word is the crux of the so-called "insidious Ketcherside-Garrett doctrine of *unity in diversity*." McClish's cruel statement against these two men is based upon a faulty interpretation of Romans 16:17. *Unity in diversity* demands acceptance and allowances toward other believers—even with mistaken views. For us to understand more fully the mindset of Garrett, a citation from him should allow us to enter into his concern over the fracturing of Christ's body, which splintering is sinful. Garrett says,

> It is noteworthy that the apostle would turn to character traits (virtues) in his great appeal for unity in Eph. 4. He first "begs" the believers to lead a life worthy of their calling, which has more to do with their fruit than with their doctrine. . . . Partyism cannot forbear anyone whose teaching or behavior threatens it's very existence. . . . One thing is sure, in cultivating the grace of loving forbearance we are acknowledging that unity is something more than conformity or uniformity. Unity by its very nature is diverse, and in Christ we have the cohesive of love that binds everything together in perfect harmony. It is coercion that makes for conformity, but it is forbearance that makes for harmony.[412]

Garrett correctly points out that forbearance fosters harmony, but coercion demands conformity. The party spirit stresses submission. On the other hand, *unity in diversity* allows for leniency and mercy. Again, the words of Garrett are quite revealing as he seeks to explain his understanding of *unity in diversity* in his numerous essays dealing with various aspects of unity among God's people. We wonder if there is any other kind of unity other than *unity in diversity*. It is a truism that individuals can no more all think alike on every subject than they can all look alike. Garrett offers the following succinct observation: "It is silly to suggest that with all our diversity in degree of maturity, intellect, emotions, and circumstances of life, we can agree on everything or interpret the scriptures in precisely the same way."[413] Garrett continues his astute observation of his teaching on *unity in diversity*:

> All this bugaboo about how wrong the "unity in diversity" concept is only reveals how men can be blinded by Partyism. In the first place, any sane man who merely stops to think knows that there can be no unity except in diversity, for that is what unity means, whether in a family, a country or nature—it is a harmony of diverse parts. . . . But it is imperative that we realize that we are all in Jesus together in spite of these differences; and because we are in Jesus together we are sons of God together and brothers. Thank God, we are brother! We must accept each other as such even if we do meet separately.[414]

Garrett advances the belief that Christians are to receive one another in the same way that Jesus receives them to the glory of God—"warts and all." His belief system is patterned after Paul's teaching concerning *unity in* diversity. For example, Paul zeros in on this *unity in diversity* concept in his letter to the Romans:

> May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. (Romans 15:5-7)

Again, what is the context of Romans 16:17? Again, I remind the reader that this text is the culmination of what Paul stated in Romans 14 and 15. Listen to just a few of his remarks from Romans 14 about his insistence on *unity in diversity*:

> Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. [2] One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. [3] The man who eats everything must not look

[412]Leroy Garrett, "Forbearance and Unity," *Restoration Review* 15, no. 1 (January 1973): 13, 14.
[413]Leroy Garrett, "Can Two Walk Together," *Restoration Review* 17, no. 7 (September 1975): 124.
[414]Ibid., 124, 125.

down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. [4] Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. (Romans 14:1-4)

Once more, the writings of Paul to the Corinthians also reveal his insistence on the belief of *unity in diversity*, despite the opposite views of McClish and King. The Corinthians did not have it all together as far as Paul was concerned. Some believers wanted to coerce other believers into conformity. But, Paul sought to nip-in-the-bud the conformity mentality:

Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge.[a] Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. [2] The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. [3] But the man who loves God is known by God. [4] So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. [5] For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), [6] yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. [7] But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. [8] But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do. [9] Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. [10] For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? [11] So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. [12] When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. (1 Corinthians 8:1-12)

Within every Christian community, there are differences. Paul asserts human weakness when he writes in his summary of what he had just previously discussed in Chapters 8-12. Listen to him as he deals with knowledge in his Corinthian correspondence: "For we know in part and we prophesy in part" (13:9). As stated above, no two people can anymore think alike than they can all look alike. For individuals to always see eye-to-eye on every subject or biblical text is not humanly possible. The Christian writer John R. W. Stott (b. 1921), British Christian leader and Anglican clergyman and leader of the worldwide evangelical movement, has penned some compelling words that need to be heard by every child of God. He captures the very heart of *unity in diversity* when he writes: "Equally devout, equally humble, equally Bible-believing and Bible studying Christians or churches reach different conclusions must be considered secondary not primary, peripheral, not central."[415]

Jack Lewis, a scholar respected within and outside the Churches of Christ, expresses the basic problem over the traditional interpretation of Romans 16:17 espoused by many within the Churches of Christ: "The obligation, almost universally felt among our preaching brothers, to label other preaching brothers who hold positions thought to be erroneous, rest upon a misunderstanding of Romans 16:17."[416] When believers apply this text to other saints who do not concur with their comprehension, we cannot help but wonder if they have not allowed their deep-seated prejudice to shape their verdict before the evidence is even considered. In other words, their narrow-mindedness negates the possibility of grasping the intent of the text correctly.

Once more, Alexander Campbell is called upon since he recognized so well the impossibility of achieving unity based upon opinion. He laid bare the naked truth that salvation is based upon acceptance of Jesus, not correct judgment. The following quote is rather lengthy, but, in spite of its length, it is still worth reflecting upon for its profound truths:

The Apostle says, "There is one body, one spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one immersion, one God and Father of all." But no where is it said in the sacred book, There is one opinion. If however, unity of opinion were desirable, to attain it, we must give the greatest liberty of opinion; for though once theory with us, it is now matter of experience, that the more stress is laid upon unity of opinion, the less of it, and the more division; and the less regard paid to it, the less

[a] Or *"We all possess knowledge," as you say*

[415] John R. W. Stott, *Christ the Controversialist* (Illinois: InterVarsity, 1970), 44.

[416] Jack P. Lewis, *Exegesis of Difficult Passages* (Arkansas: Resource Publications, 1988), 112.

emphasis laid upon it, the more we will have of it. This is founded in a law of the human mind, on which it is unseasonable and unnecessary to expatiate[417]. . . .

Amongst Christians there is now, as there was at the beginning, a very great diversity in the knowledge of the Christian institution. There are babes, children, young men, and fathers in Christ now, as well as in the days of the Apostle John. This from the natural gifts of God, from the diversities of age, education, and circumstances is, unavoidable. And would it not be just as rational and as scriptural to excommunicate one another, because our knowledge is less or greater than any fixed measure, as for differences of opinion on matters of speculation? . . . In most instances the greatest error of which a brother can be guilty, is to study his Bible more than his companions—or, at least, to surpass them in his knowledge of the mystery of Christ.[418]

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

One cannot help but wonder what the real controversy is over concerning the acceptance of *unity in diversity* as a biblical principle. The fear is that this idea of unity opens the door to a wider fellowship than is generally allowed within most Churches of Christ. The nightmare is that this perception of diversity will unlock the door to believers that are not members of the denominational Church of Christ. Today, many religious leaders within the Churches of Christ advance the notion that only those who meet behind the label Church of Christ belong to the Lord's community, which they frequently call the "Lord's Church."

In the nineteenth-century, men such as **Barton Stone** (1772-1844) and the **Campbells** (**Alexander** [1788-1866] and **Thomas** [1763-1854]) did not hold such narrow-minded views about the Christian **ἐκκλησία** (commonly translated church). **Both Thomas and Alexander sought to bring about unity among all denominations.** It is also in this same vein that Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett also caught a glimpse of what *unity in diversity* means. In addition to this understanding, they also discovered what the word *ekklēsia* connotes in the New Testament writings. The result of these newfound truths opened the floodgates to the acceptance of other believers, that is, even those not associated with the Church of Christ denomination. Our attitude or understanding of the English word *church* contributes either unity or disunity toward one's perception of *unity in diversity*.

Garrett's consciousness of the meaning of the Greek word **ἐκκλησία** (*ekklēsia*, "assembly, congregation, church") caused him to see a wider meaning than just the ecclesiastical overtones normally associated with the English word *church*. This perception caused him to seek unity among all God's people. Through his writings, Garrett aspires to reestablish a true sensitivity to a more correct definition of the word *church* in light of Scripture. His comments in this area are concise and revealing.

> We use "church" because it is so commonly employed, and it is likely to remain with us. What is important is that we give the term no *institutional* meaning. The church of the New Covenant scriptures is nothing more than the body of Christ, consisting of all those who are "in Christ," irrespective of the claims of sects and denominations. . . . It is noteworthy that every reformation effort has sought to restore the integrity of the nature of the church. Luther challenged the hierarchy's claim to be the authoritative church, insisting that the church is the people of God and not simply the clergy. Thus restoring the concept of the priesthood of all believers. Thus emerged "the reformed tradition" which has seen the church as the fellowship of all believers.[419]

Both Garrett and Ketcherside postulated that the people of God are larger than the denominational Church of Christ. Many years before these men came to a proper awareness of the true nature of the ekklhsia, there were others who had already addressed the correct makeup of the church. For example, Barton Stone (1772-1844) wrote: "We will, that this body die, be dissolved, and sink into union with the Body of Christ at large, for there is one Body, and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling."[420] Stone

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[417]To speak or write in detail about.

[418]Alexander Campbell, "To Mr. William Jones, of London. Letter IV," *Millennial Harbinger* 6, no. 3 (March 1835): 111, 112.

[419]Leroy Garrett, "Introduction," *Restoration Review* 15, no. 1 (January 1973): 2, 3.

[420]See Thomas Campbell and Barton W. Stone, *Declaration and Address [1809] and the Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery [1804]* (St. Louis: Mission Messenger, 1955, reprint), 17.

considered the various denominations of his day as a part of the "Body of Christ at large." Campbell, too, attempted to restore the biblical concept of the church. He wrote:

> But we have yet a broader, a stronger, and, perhaps, a still more striking and convincing view of the duty of all the individual churches in a province, a state, or a kingdom, to co-operate as one church, in all matters of public interest and property to the whole Kingdom of Jesus Christ in a nation, in an empire, or in the world. This is clearly ascertained from one most palpable and most interesting fact. This fact is, that the word *church*, in the singular number, is, by sacred and apostolic usage, often made to represent all the churches in a nation, an empire, or in the world. It is a term used as a commensurate with the whole body of Christ, or the entire community of all the faithful on earth. Hence, there is but one kingdom of Christ, one body of Christ, or one church of Christ on earth. The word *church*, by reference to its occurrences in the New Testament, indicates the whole Christian community on earth.[421]

Again, Garrett, too, points out with justice: "It is a family that we must come to see the church. It is not an institution or organization, but a family community of brothers and sisters."[422] When we come to possess a more accurate understanding of the word *church*, then this awareness should help to promote the spirit of unity among God's family. Within the body of Christ, there will always be variation of opinions concerning doctrinal matters. This factor is, no doubt, one reason that Paul forces home this point about the Spirit's unity in the epistle to the Ephesians. Paul carefully enumerates reasons for maintaining the unity created by the Holy Spirit:

> As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 **Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit** through the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:1-6)

Paul's words, "bearing with one another in love" and "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit" indicate that diversity existed within that body of believers. As stated earlier, Paul also calls attention to this mixture of beliefs within the congregation at Rome. Since there is only "one body," it is imperative that Christians seek to support unity in spite of differences. Diversity allows for defective understanding. For one to be in fellowship with another Christian, this consciousness and practice of fellowship does not indicate total endorsement of the other person's belief system. Christians are one because they have the same Father, not because they have comprehended every Scripture unerringly. Fellowship and endorsement are not one and the same. We are in fellowship with God, but who is so foolish as to advance the notion that God endorses everything we believe and do. We also can be in fellowship with other Christians and not endorse everything the other person believes.

FELLOWSHIP AND PERFECT AGREEMENT

For some, so it appears, before fellowship commences, one's insight of God's Revelation must be perfect, at least in what many consider to be essentials. But what are the essentials? The fundamentals vary. The nuts and bolts depend on which party you are aligned with. Without an understanding of *unity in diversity*, we cannot fully grasp the full significance of Romans 16:17. Before we embark upon the context of Romans 16:17, it is necessary to reflect upon the distinction between God's written Revelation and our interpretation of God's Holy Word.

Many cannot distinguish between *interpretation* and *Revelation* itself. The religious leaders in Jesus' day also failed to discern the difference between God's Word and tradition. Interpretation is what individuals think God meant by what He said. On the other hand, Revelation is what God says. The two are not synonymous. We should never equate our interpretation of God's Revelation as the Word of God itself. Is our connection with God dependent upon complete exactness in knowledge? If so, then no one has union with God.

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[421]Alexander Campbell, "Church Organization—No. IV" *Millennial Harbinger*, fourth series, 3, no. 6 (June 1853): 303.
[422]Leroy Garrett, "The Catholicity of the Church," *Restoration Review* 15, no. 3 (March 1973): 45.

Is our bond, or relationship, with God conditional upon our acceptance of Jesus as Lord in our life? If so, then we can have relationship with Him. Again, is our association with God conditional upon exactness in knowledge? How do we stand in God's presence?

Is it justification by faith in the finished work of Christ upon Calvary, or is it justification through flawless discernment of God's written Revelation? Should we make a test of fellowship out of spiritual discernment or digestion? Is there a difference between Gospel and doctrine? Is there a difference between faith and knowledge? Is it the Gospel that brings us into being? Or is rebirth a result of complete comprehension of doctrine? Are not teachings (doctrines) of Christ for growth and well-being? Can Christians always think alike on every subject? Can any two individuals upon earth attain to an identical degree of knowledge about everything at the same point in time? Answers to these questions should assist us in arriving at a better grasp of Romans 16:17 without being so dogmatic and factious.

We should always read with discrimination in order to pick out the most theologically sound thinkers if we wish to emulate them in their quest for Christian unity for which Jesus prayed. Just a perusal of the writings of Ketcherside and Garrett makes us conscious that these two men fall into this category of sound thinkers. Both men constantly, in their writings, call attention to context, context, context, and context. It is always context that determines the meaning. Ketcherside has penned one of the most thought provoking articles that cuts through the maze of illogical thinking in order to grasp the very heart of what fellowship is all about. He is perfectly right, as stated earlier, when he insists that

> Those who were in Christ in the days of the apostles were in error on many points. They were mistaken about a lot of things but they were not charged with "preaching another gospel." Freedom from error is not a condition of salvation else all men would be damned. We are not saved by attainment to a certain degree of knowledge but by faith in Christ Jesus. It is by belief of facts related to him, and not by grasp of abstract truth, that we are justified before God. Certainly it is not by performance of meritorious deeds nor by legalistic conformity. When we postulate a program of justification by knowledge we hang ourselves on the gallows we have constructed to rid ourselves of others, unless we are prepared to make ourselves even more ridiculous by affirming that we know as much as God.[423]

Ketcherside captures the very essence of the life-force of the Roman letter. Romans 16:17 is the culmination of the previous fifteen chapters. One must not interpret this text in isolation. The above citations from Ketcherside and Garrett are in harmony with the teachings of the Book of Romans. We can only conclude from reading this famous Epistle that our level of knowledge is not the determining factor in our fellowship with God, but rather it is justification by faith. Salvation is a gift, and, since it is a gift, then we are to put forth every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

ANALYSIS AND APPLICATION OF ROMANS 16:17 IN CONTEXT

> Like any growth, development may be healthy or it may be malignant; discerning the difference between these two kinds of growth requires constant research into the pathology of traditions. But it is healthy development that keeps a tradition both out of the cancer ward and out of the fossil museum.[424]

What is the context of Romans 16:17? Some of the Romans were basing fellowship upon a correct interpretation of all doctrinal issues—*unity in conformity*. Paul refutes this position of absolute perfection in knowledge as a condition of fellowship. In Chapters 14 and 15, he deals with imperfection in knowledge within the Christian community. How should we react to the immature in the faith? How should we react toward those whose belief system was not correct in every detail? In these two chapters, Paul discusses how Christians are to respond to differences within the church at Rome.

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[423]Carl Ketcherside, "Another Gospel," *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 1 (January 1965): 6-7.

[424]Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984). 60.

Paul goes right to the very core of disagreements and how to deal with the individual whose knowledge is inadequate. I urge each person to stand upon the threshold of the Romans as you read the words of Paul: "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (Romans 15:7). This Scripture sets forth the truth that God accepted them with "warts and all." Thus, Paul is saying that we are to imitate God in our relationship with one another. Prior to this statement though, he encourages them to "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters" (14:1).

Now, what happens if an individual refuses to accept the above admonitions and seeks to force his belief on others to the point of division? Paul then summarizes his reaction to the factious person: "I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them" (16:17). This statement by Paul does not condemn men like Ketcherside and Garrett, but rather, this verse is a rebuke to all Christians who refuse to acknowledge the teachings of Paul in Romans 14 and 15. What had they learned? They had learned *unity in diversity*.

This emphasis upon *unity in diversity* is also the subject of the Ephesian letter: "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). This is the same kind of instructions that Paul charges the Christians at Rome to practice: "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 15:5-6).

Disputable Matters in the Roman Church

Without consulting the context of Romans 16:17, we can postulate bizarre interpretations. Prior to Paul's appeal "to watch out for those who cause divisions" (16:17), he instructs the saints to "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters" (14:1). The context tends to indicate that some believers wanted to force their so-called correct interpretation (some were right and some were wrong in their understanding) on other Christians. Some, in the congregation at Rome, insisted upon everyone submitting to their views. Paul writes with penetrating words, "Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind" (14:5). There is a vast difference between in "my mind" and your "own mind." In other words, one's conviction must be based upon his or her own conclusions, not someone else's beliefs:

> So whatever you believe about these things keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves. [23] But the man who has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and everything that does not come from faith is sin. (14:22-23)

There was a dispute over the eating of meats and vegetables: "One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables" (14:2). Paul is declaring that no one should create division over his or her personal understanding of meats or vegetables or days. It is in this same vein that Paul writes, "He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God" (14:6). Paul sets forth the words of the Holy Spirit to refute the practice of enforcing conformity: "Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand" (14:4). Again, Paul widens this position by reminding them: "Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind" (14:5). If believers were not willing to abide by this spirit of toleration, then Paul utters,

> I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. [18]For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people. (16:17-18)

Paul's admonition is: "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves" (15:1). Those who cite Romans 16:17 to justify their separation from other believers are the very ones that Paul is warning the believers to keep an eye on. It is also in this same vein that Paul advises Titus:

"Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned" (Titus 3:10-11). It is very difficult for Christians to apply the Scriptures correctly when it comes to their "pet theories" concerning communion cups, Sunday school, grape juice or wine as the drink element in the Lord's Supper, acappella singing, instrumental music, Sunday collection, and so on. Making allowances for the beliefs of others is a part of the "teaching you have learned" (Romans 16:17).

Disputable Matters in the Corinthian Church

The church in Corinth experienced the same difficulties that the church did in Rome. In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he addresses the differences within the body of Christ. The problem he faces is the concern of perfection in one's knowledge. This Epistle concedes that knowledge of absolute truth is relative. He is not saying that truth is relative, but rather, that one's brainpower of total truth is relative. In other words, no one understands perfectly. Paul tackles the question of flawless knowledge head-on: "The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know" (1 Corinthians 8:2).

As we reflect upon this statement of Paul, anyone in his or her right mind will concede that this imperfection in knowledge is still with humanity. How many Christians know everything as they "ought to know"? Why do individuals purchase books to study? Why do Churches of Christ establish educational institutions to train preachers? Why do other denominations establish educational institutions? Is it not because people do not know everything as they "ought to know"? Yet, in spite of this testimonial, Paul admits that knowledge is not totally absent from the minds of men and women: "We know that we all possess knowledge" (8:1).

In fact, Paul has to deal with believers who think that they know it all. Christians sometimes feel that because of their superior knowledge that they are just a "notch above" the others. He calls attention to the dangers that lurk behind the attitude of "I know." Listen to Paul as he cautions the Christians about knowledge: "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up" (8:1). Yes, Paul is saying, it is true that we all have knowledge, but knowledge can puff one up. The question that confronts everyone is: Does God know the individual whose knowledge is defective? Is God concerned about the hearts of men and women? Or, is God just concerned about our being able to cross every "t" and to dot every "i"?

Again, Paul, through the Holy Spirit, reveals the mind of God: "The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. **But the man who loves God is known by God**" (8:2-3). Paul is saying that God loves the person whose knowledge is incomplete if he or she loves God. We may not be accurate in our thinking on every point, but love is the determinative factor in God's acceptance of us: "the man who loves God is known by God" (8:3). What Paul is saying to the Corinthians is the same as "the insidious Ketcherside-Garrett doctrine of '*unity in diversity*.'" In spite of McClish's negative comments about these two men, nevertheless, both men were endeavoring to honor the words of Holy Scripture.

Before concluding this analysis of Paul's thinking in his letter to Corinth, it would be helpful to pursue his line of reasoning for his beginning statements about knowledge being relative. Paul fully grasps the dilemma of perfect knowledge versus one's relationship with God. In Chapter 8 of First Corinthians, he reveals what some of the issues were over:

> So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. [5] For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), [6] yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. [7] But not everyone knows this. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. [8] But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do. (8:4-8)

This eighth chapter of First Corinthians is *unity in diversity*. Within this twenty-first century, there are very few Churches of Christ that would welcome Paul in their congregations to address the assembly. In fact,

there would be very few Church of Christ universities that would allow Paul to teach in their midst. He would be accused of *liberalism* and *digression*. Why? He believed in *unity in diversity*. Are the individuals whose knowledge was deficient about God still brothers and sisters in Christ as discussed by Paul in the Book of Romans and the Book of First Corinthians? Should they have been thrown out of the synagogue for famine of knowledge? Were they liberals and digressives? Was God concerned about these persons who stilled loved him, in spite of undersupplied information? What does Paul say about their condition? Listen to him as he reveals the mind of God concerning imbecility of intellect:

> Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. [10] For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? [11] So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. [12] When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. [13] Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall. (8:9-13)

Has God's attitude changed toward those who love Him? Do we sin against Christ when we become a stumbling block to the weak brother or sister? Christians who are not willing to make allowances for imperfection in knowledge for the "weak brother" are the ones to whom Paul speaks in Romans 16:17: "I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them." Again, *unity in diversity* is the thrust of Paul's discussion of differences in the church at Rome and Corinth and Ephesus. It is appropriate once more to turn to the principles advanced in the writings of Garrett and Campbell.

LEROY GARRETT AND ALEXANDER CAMPBELL ON UNITY IN DIVERSITY

These two men—Leroy Garrett and Alexander Campbell—addressed this principle of *unity in diversity* throughout their writings. The principles they advanced—Garrett still advances—were and are based upon the writings of Paul. Hopefully, this repetition may be pardoned here since the mind of man is leavened by the traditions of the church, which still prevails in Christendom, by Christians who undermine the teachings of God in this area in order to maintain doctrinal purity of approximately one hundred and fifty years of rituals in a so-called worship ceremony. It is fitting to call Garrett to the scene once more to hear his explanation of Romans 16:17 in context, which analysis has brought the wrath, the anger, the rage, and the fury of the established church against him with all the hatred one can muster.

> The phrase "contrary to the teachings you received" almost certainly refers to the teaching on unity in spite of differences which he had just laid before them in the letter, especially Ro. 14. . . . The truth is that we can hold such differences and still be one. This is because we are in the fellowship with Jesus together. It is not doctrines that make us one. . . . Those who insist that we line up on their opinions, or else suffer their wrath and oppression, are really the ones to mark and avoid, in view of the real meaning of Ro. 16:17.[425]

When Christians seek to regulate unity upon unconditional unanimity of agreement, then no unity can exist within the body of Christ. As we peruse the religious journals within the Churches of Christ, we soon discover that no two people are in total harmony on every doctrinal belief. Alexander Campbell, in his consciousness of differences in mental acumen, put it succinctly for all believers:

> Amongst Christians there is now, as there was at the beginning, a very great diversity in the knowledge of the Christian institution. There are babes, children, young men, and fathers in Christ now, as well as in the days of the Apostle John. This, from the natural gifts of God, from the diversities of age, education, and circumstances, is unavoidable. And would it not be just as rational and as scriptural to excommunicate one another, because our knowledge is less or greater than any fixed measure, as for differences of opinion on matters of speculation? . . . In most instances the

[425]Leroy Garrett, "Mark Them Which Cause Divisions," *Restoration Review* 17, no. 2 (February 1975): 25.

> greatest error of which a brother can be guilty, is to study his Bible more than his companions—at least, to surpass them in his knowledge of the mystery of Christ.[426]

Campbell calls attention to something that is already well known. It goes almost without saying that in the body of Christ, there will always be infants, children, young men, and fathers. Every child of God is at a different level of knowledge. The saints are to grow in knowledge and in favor with God. There will never be "one opinion," however much desired. This plea for unity is the crux of the so-called "insidious Ketcherside-Garrett doctrine of '*unity in diversity.*'" Campbell, Ketcherside, and Garrett sought to correct the misapplication of Romans 16:17, which fostered and still advances dissection within the camp of God's citizens. Within the Church of Christ denomination alone, the divisions number twenty-five or more warring factions. In addition to this once united body of believers, one is also confronted with other denominations that are also divided into hundreds of aggressive splinter groups.

CONCLUSION

One of the major objectives of this chapter is to assist believers in dropping their sectarian spirit and learning to accept those for whom Christ died and for whom He accepted. The question that confronts us is: Does anyone have 20/20 vision? When we read Romans 16:17 without spectacles, we quickly become conscious that the demand for complete agreement in all doctrinal matters is not under consideration, but rather the making of allowances for the weak. Believers are one in Jesus—not because they see every Scripture exactly alike, but rather, because they are reconciled to God through the sacrificial Atonement of Jesus. God's children can no more see alike on every subject than they can all look alike.

Paul's numerous letters reveal that salvation is not contingent upon absolute perfection in knowledge, but rather upon trust in Jesus as Lord. He stresses two essential truths throughout the Book of Romans: (1) salvation by faith "in" and "through" Jesus, not by works, and (2) allowances for imperfection in knowledge over issues that do not affect our salvation. If we do not allow for imperfection in knowledge and accept the brother or sister whose knowledge is deficient, then, we are not adhering to the teaching we have learned (16:17). Absolute freedom from error is not a condition of salvation; else all men and women would be damned. All error is error but not all error will condemn one's soul; else no one could be saved. All truth is true but not all truth is essential to deliverance from damnation; else all men and women would be lost.

A careful reading of the context of Romans 16:17 indicates that Paul's statement is about those who refuse to abide by his principles of toleration, not doctrinal purity. In this verse, Paul is seeking to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace by enduring the weak. This Scripture is one of the most abused Scriptures within the Churches of Christ. This study seeks to look at an old text through new eyes. As a result, this in-depth study sets forth an interpretation that is based upon the context, not one's presuppositions. In making this judgment, we must not conclude that Christians who misappropriate this text in order to justify their separation from other believers are not Christians. But their sincerity does not make them right, and it has caused untold suffering among God's people. My reason for such a lengthy explanation of this text is to help bring about unity for which our Lord prayed as recorded in John 17.

In spite of the negative overtones associated with the names Ketcherside and Garrett, nevertheless, both of these men sought to prevent individuals from creating division within the body of Christ by laying bare the naked truth of God's Word from the traditions of men and women. These two men called for God's people to learn how to reevaluate and reinterpret what has been handed down through the centuries. In other words, they wanted God's children not to confuse one's interpretation with the text itself. Many Christians are so accustomed to reading the Bible as they have been taught by generations of godly interpreters that any questioning of the traditional interpretation appears to be a questioning of Scripture itself. The hand-me-down

[426]Alexander Campbell, "To Mr. William Jones, of London, Letter IV," *Millennial Harbinger* 7, no. 3 (March 1835): 112.

practices in the church have made it difficult, if not impossible, for many Christians to read the Bible correctly.[427]

If we wish to comprehend the words of Paul in Romans 16:17, we must reread Chapters 14 and 15 of this book for the context of 16:17. Paul pleads for toleration on the part of those who sought to make their understanding the criterion by which one determined one's standing before God. Yet, Paul contradicted this philosophy. Listen to Paul once more as he enumerates his thoughts—thoughts given by the Holy Spirit:

- Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. (14:1)
- Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. (14:4)
- Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. (14:5b)
- Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. (15:7)

Paul enumerates the teaching they had learned in Romans 14 and 15. The immediate context of 16:17 is found in the two preceding chapters. Paul sets forth the spirit of unity, that is to say, the spirit of toleration for differences within the Christian community. As Christians, we need to reexamine old texts through new eyes.

The next chapter (15) discusses Uzzah and the Ark of the Covenant. This chapter analyzes the misuse of this well-known story in order to continue to promote divisions among countless Christians. This narrative is used in an illegal way to promote justification for separation from other believers who do not subscribe to a so-called pattern theology of worship. Pattern theology holds to the view that God has ordained a certain blueprint that individuals are to practice when they come together on Sunday morning for public glorification of the One who sent His Son to die for us. Generally, the model is associated with five-acts of prearranged rituals—ceremonies that have to be performed in a precise manner in order for devotion to be true and not in vain.

The analogy between ***then*** and ***now*** is that since God killed Uzzah for reaching out and touching the Ark of the Covenant then God will also reach out and destroy anyone who violates one of the so-called prescribed rituals to be acted upon on Sunday morning. One of the problems in this scenario is that God has not ordained, or designed, a worship ceremony with five formal procedures, which actions are outlined in Holy Scripture. One is hard-pressed to find such instructions in the New Covenant teachings.

The story of Uzzah and the Ark of the Covenant deals with Uzzah's disregard for God's holiness. He is not the only one that suffered death for his neglect of God's holiness. The story of Uzzah is called forth by some Christians to condemn other Christians who use instrumental music in praise to God in the assembly of the saints. Some within the Churches of Christ employ this scenario to denounce those believers who use individual communion cups in the observance of the Lord's Supper. The list is almost without number. Chapter 15 seeks to set forth the historical circumstances surrounding this story about God's holiness and His presence.

[427]I am deeply indebted to Justo and Catherine Gonzalez for much insight concerning the effect of tradition upon one's handling of Holy Scripture. See Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990).

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Uzzah and the Ark of the Covenant

The story of Uzzah is well known among Christians from every denomination. The Churches of Christ though, as a whole, utilize this story in a very unique way to illustrate the severity of God when we violate one of the so-called five sacred acts of worship as interpreted by various Christians within the twenty-five or more divisions in this once united body of believers. This narrative is relied upon to demonstrate that if we employ the instrument in praise to God in the gathering of His people on Sunday morning, God will zap us with eternal punishment. This story is also cited to frighten Christians who use individual communion cups in the observance of the Lord's Supper. We are taught to abandon such practices; else God will condemn us to an eternal burning hell. This same Scripture is also utilized against Christians who participate in Bible studies on Sunday morning for various age groups.

It is not uncommon for many saints within the twenty-five (or more) divisions within the Churches of Christ to lay claim to this Scripture as their own unique property in order to condemn those outside their particular fellowship. Before I analyze this most abused passage in Second Samuel (6:1-15), it would be helpful to observe something of the Ark's colorful history in order to set the background for a proper interpretation and application to this much ill-treated text. This background study demonstrates that Uzzah's mistake lies in his failure to understand God's presence and holiness associated with the Ark of the Covenant. His death is not the only death associated with God's Ark.

Just a perusal of the Scriptures reveals a very colorful history of the Ark that puts fear into the hearts of so many people. This study is not designed to discuss the covering (mercy-seat) on the Ark of the Covenant. My purpose in this in-depth study is to arrive at the reason for Uzzah's death in what appears to be a trivial thing to the modern-day reader. Hopefully, this analysis will keep Christians from doing the foolish thing they often do, that is, to employ this Scripture as a means of castigating those who disagree with many of their treasured viewpoints. Robert Stein, a world-renowned scholar of the synoptic Gospels, captures the very heart of a correct intellectual sensitivity of determining the true meaning of a Scripture within its own context:

> The understanding of a text involves the correct mental perception of a text's meaning. Another way of saying this is that understanding involves a correct grasp of the pattern of meaning willed by the author. Since there is a single meaning that the author willed, each individual who understands this meaning will have the same mental grasp of the author's pattern of meaning. Some understandings may be more complete than others because of a greater perception of the various implications involved, but, if an understanding is correct, it must have the same mental grasp of the author's meaning as any other understanding. Thus, although one person's understanding of meaning may be greater or more exhaustive than another's (because of a greater awareness of the various implication involved), every correct mental grasp of the author's meaning, or understanding, will be the same.[428]

[428]Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 49.

GOD'S HOLINESS AND THE ARK OF GOD

God speaks to Moses and informs him about the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25:10-22). One significant thing about this Ark is that God tells Moses that He will meet and speak to him from between the two cherubim that are over the Ark of the Testimony (25:22). Thus, the Ark of the Covenant is extremely holy. We cannot help but recall Moses' encounter with God from the burning bush (3:1-6). When Moses, after hearing God speak to him from within the burning bush, approached God, He warned him, "Do not come any closer" (3:5). Why? Well, listen to God's reason: "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground" (3:5).

The holiness of God is involved in this narrative about Uzzah and God's Ark. But before we embark upon this particular narrative in which Uzzah discounts the holiness of God, perhaps, it would be helpful to read about another encounter in which God warned the Israelites about His holiness. The LORD said to Moses, "I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you" (19:9). And, as a result of this coming encounter, God further instructed Moses to speak to the children of Israel:

> And the LORD said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes [11]and be ready by the third day, because on that day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. [12]Put limits for the people around the mountain and tell them, 'Be careful that you do not go up the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. [13]He shall surely be stoned or shot with arrows; not a hand is to be laid on him. Whether man or animal, he shall not be permitted to live.' Only when the ram's horn sounds a long blast may they go up to the mountain." (Exodus 19:10-13)

When God commissioned Isaiah, he exclaims,

> I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. [2]Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. [3]And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." [4]At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. [5]"Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty." (Isaiah 6:1-4)

Is it any wonder that Isaiah cried: '"Woe to me!' I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty"' (6:5).

SOME HISTORICAL ENCOUNTERS WITH THE ARK OF THE COVENANT

Instructions about the Handling of the Ark of the Covenant

Moses, in the Book of Numbers, gave instructions concerning the handling of the Ark of the Covenant. Aaron and his sons were assigned certain duties toward the Ark when the camp was to move: "Aaron and his sons are to go in and take down the shielding curtain and cover the ark of the Testimony with it. Then they are to cover this with hides of sea cows, spread a cloth of solid blue over that and put the poles in place" (Numbers 4:5-6). Following this activity in preparation for the move, Aaron and his sons were to call in the Kohathites.

God informed Moses and Aaron that the "Kohathites are to come to do the carrying. But **they must not touch the holy things or they will die**. The Kohathites are to carry those things that are in the Tent of Meeting" (4:15). Not only were the Kohathites not allowed to touch the holy things, which included the Ark of the Covenant, but they were not even allowed to look at the holy things in the Tabernacle: "the Kohathites must not go in to look at the holy things, even for a moment, or they will die" (4:20). Again, we are reminded of the holiness of God.

The furniture of the Tabernacle could not be hauled on carts, only carried on their shoulders. The disassembled parts of the Tabernacle could be placed on carts; the Tabernacle proper weighed a few tons. The tribes of Israel contributed six covered carts and twelve oxen to handle the transportation of the Tent of Meeting (7:3). Moses gave "two carts and four oxen to the Gershonites, as their work required, and he gave four carts and eight oxen to the Merarites, as their work required" (4:7-8), but "Moses did not give any to the Kohathites, because they were to carry on their shoulders the holy things, for which they were responsible" (4:9).

The Ark of the Covenant Played an Important Role Among the Children of Israel

The Ark of the Covenant accompanied the children of Israel in all their wilderness wanderings (Exodus 40:33-38). Following the death of Moses (1406 BC), Joshua assumed leadership (Joshua 1:1-9), and the Ark of the Covenant accompanied them in their entrance into Canaan (Joshua 4).[429] For example, the Ark of the Covenant went with the Israelites into battle against Jericho: "Have seven priests carry trumpets of rams' horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets" (Joshua 6:4).

The writer of First Samuel also mentions the Ark of the Covenant in Shilo (1 Samuel 4:3). Since the Israelites had just lost a battle (4000 foot soldiers died) with the Philistines (4:2), they, as a result of this loss, sent men to Shilo to bring up the Ark of the Covenant (4:3). Once the Ark of the Covenant was in their camp, then, the Israelites once more went into battle with the Philistines (4:5-10). During the battle, the Philistines killed over thirty thousand foot soldiers (4:10) and captured the Ark of the Covenant (4:11).

Death and the Ark of the Covenant

The death of Uzzah was just one death among many deaths that resulted when certain individuals came into contact with the Ark of the Covenant. The Philistines suffered countless loss of life as a result of God's Ark being in their possession. The presence of the Ark in their territory brought nothing but terror. As a result of this panic, they, in an attempt to escape the terrible effects (1 Samuel 5),[430] moved the Ark from city to city. After the Philistines captured the Ark, they took it from Ebenezer to Ashdod (5:1). But the Scriptures reveal that "The LORD's hand was heavy upon the people of Ashdod and its vicinity; he brought devastation upon them and afflicted them with tumors. When the men of Ashdod saw what was happening, they said, 'The ark of the god of Israel must not stay here with us, because his hand is heavy upon us and upon Dagon our god'" (5:6-8).

The people of Ashdod sent the Ark to Gath (5:8), but again, the people of Gath also experienced God's heavy-hand upon the city: "But after they had moved it, the LORD's hand was against that city, throwing it into a great panic. He afflicted the people of the city, both young and old, with an outbreak of tumors" (5:9). The Ark was then sent to Ekron (5:10). By this time, the word had gotten out about the calamities that had fallen upon Ashdod and Gath. The writer of First Samuel states: "As the ark of God was entering Ekron, the people of Ekron cried out, 'They have brought the ark of the god of Israel around to us to kill us and our people'" (5:10). They called the rulers together and requested that they send the Ark of the God of Israel away (5:11).

Why such an urgent meeting and demand by the citizens of Ekron? Listen again to the people as they call attention to their condition: "So they called together all the rulers of the Philistines and said, 'Send the ark of the god of Israel away; let it go back to its own place, or it will kill us and our people'" (5:11). Had any died as a result of the Ark in their city? The writer of First Samuel confirms what the people were saying: "For death had filled the city with panic; God's hand was very heavy upon it. Those who did not die were afflicted with tumors, and the outcry of the city went up to heaven" (5:11-12). Because of God's heavy hand of punishment, the Ark was returned to Israel (6:1-12). The Ekronites placed the Ark on a "new cart ready, with two cows that

[429]The Book of Joshua covers twenty-one years of history (1406-1385 BC).

[430]The Book of First Samuel covers a period of ninety years—from the birth of Samuel to the death of Saul in 1010 BC.

have calved and have never been yoked. Hitch the cows to the cart, but take their calves away and pen them up" (6:7).

The two cows went toward the territory of Israel—Beth Shemesh (6:9). Upon its arrival in Beth Shemesh, the people chopped up the wood of the cart and sacrificed the two cows as a burnt offering to the Lord (6:14). Then, the Levites took down the Ark of the Lord, as well as the gold objects sent with the Ark, and placed the Ark and gold object on the large rock (6:15) where the cows stopped (6:14). But the people of Beth Shemesh also experienced death: "But God struck down some of the men of Beth Shemesh, putting seventy of them to death because they had looked into the ark of the LORD" (6:19).

Uzzah and the Ark of the Covenant

Second Samuel records the episode of Uzzah and the Ark of the Covenant (2 Samuel 6:6-7).[431] In this book we find information related to David's bringing the Ark of God to Jerusalem (6:1-19). Uzzah may well have belonged to the clan of the Kohathites.[432] As stated earlier, God informed Moses: "After Aaron and his sons have finished covering the holy furnishings and all the holy articles, and when the camp is ready to move, the Kohathites are to come to do the carrying. But **they must not touch the holy things or they will die**. The Kohathites are to carry those things that are in the Tent of Meeting" (Numbers 4:15). The Kohathites were not to be cut off from the Levites "So that they may live and not die when they come near the most holy things, do this for them: Aaron and his sons are to go into the sanctuary and assign to each man his work and what he is to carry, but **the Kohathites must not go in to look at the holy things, even for a moment, or they will die**" (4:19-20).

When Uzzah touched the Ark of the Covenant, God's anger burned against him for "his irreverent act" (2 Samuel 6:7). This Ark was so sacred that even the high priest was prohibited from entering the Most Holy Place of the Tabernacle that housed the Ark of the Covenant except on the Day of Atonement: "The LORD said to Moses: 'Tell your brother Aaron not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die, because I appear in the cloud over the atonement cover'" (Leviticus 16:2). Whenever we encounter the Ark of the Covenant, we encounter the presence of God. Uzzah could not plead ignorance. He committed an act of treason against God. His touching the Ark of God was an act of clear rebellion and disregard for God's holiness and presence.

Holiness and the Believer

Many Christians are horrified by this story of Uzzah. The story of Uzzah is not just about the holiness of God—even though it is that—but it also about His presence. In spite of the death of Uzzah, this story should teach us that the holiness and presence of God is **not** something to trample upon. The episode of Uzzah should imprint upon our minds that God is holy. When we reflect upon the holiness of God today, does this holiness make us stand in awe? Is God just someone "up in the sky"? Is He just "big daddy"? Or is God simply the "old man" above? Do we have the sense of "hallowed be your name" (Matthew 6:9) when we pray? In our encounter with God, do we reflect upon the Old Testament's concept of God's holiness and presence? What does "take off your sandals" convey to you? The worshipers of the Old Testament knew that "take off your sandals" (Exodus 3:5) spoke of the presence and holiness of God. Abraham's meeting with God called forth this cry: "I am nothing but dust and ashes" (Genesis 18:27). Do we ever feel this way? The story of Uzzah and the Ark of the Covenant is about his disrespect for God's presence and God's holiness.

Isaiah also understood something of God's holiness and presence when he saw the Lord seated on a throne: '"Woe to me!' I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of

[431]Second Samuel begins in 1010 BC and ends in approximately 970 BC.

[432]Kohath was one of the three sons of Levi (Numbers 3:17).

unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty'" (Isaiah 6:5). Even Peter begged Jesus, following his witness to a miracle, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" (Luke 5:8). Even the four living creatures, described in the Book of Revelation by John, exclaims, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come" (Revelation 4:8). Do we have this awe for the holiness of God? If so, then we too will seek to be holy even as He is holy. Peter writes: "But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy" (1 Peter 1:15).

Since we are servants of righteousness, we are to present ourselves holy to the Lord. It is in this regard that Paul admonishes the believers at Rome:

> Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual[a] act of worship. [2]Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:1-2)

Peter, as mentioned above, also calls for holiness in the life of the believers: "Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:13-16).

The author of the Book of Hebrews also calls attention to Jesus' action that resulted in a holy people: "The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp, and so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate **to make the people holy** through his own blood" (Hebrews 13:11-12). Since we are "the holy people" of God, this fact of holiness necessitates certain changes in our lives in order to coincide with our new nature: "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased" (13:15-16). Because we are redeemed through the blood of Christ, the author of Hebrews says,

> Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens,[a] Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. [15] For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. [16] Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (4:14-16)

CONCLUSION

When we reject the traditional slant (interpretation) attached to Uzzah's condemnation, we are not rejecting the importance of obedience in the life of the believer. To cite this incident to maintain our justification for separation from other Christians because of disagreements over doctrinal matters is manipulation of this text. To apply this story to a so-called worship service on Sunday morning with its five rituals performed in a prescribed way is to tear this story out of its context. This biblical data is distorted through the "spectacles" of our historical traditions. One reason for such distortion is that many Christians approach this text with their strong subjective biases. Many sincere believers see what they want to see through their "colored glasses" of long-cherished traditions. "Proof-texting" is a poor way to discover the meaning of a text. Cedric B. Johnson is on target when he writes with sharpness:

> There is a danger in viewing the Bible as an encyclopedia. An encyclopedia has many facts but most of them are unrelated. Some people seem to view the Bible as a series of unrelated verses. Such a totally atomistic approach to

[a] Or *reasonable*

[a] Or *gone into heaven*

> biblical interpretation would be rare, but a faulty or incomplete understanding of context is a common problem of interpreters.[433]

If God had authorized a traditional worship service with its five acts of worship as practiced among many Christians today, this Scripture is still the wrong Scripture to cite to condemn others over their so-called misunderstanding of certain traditions advanced by certain fellowships. If God had specified only vocal music and excluded instrumental accompaniment, then we would still need to cite another story other than the Uzzah story to illustrate the wrath of God against instrumental music, individual communion cups, Sunday school, and so on. Uzzah's story is about honoring God's presence or holiness. It is wrong to employ this Scripture in a way that the Holy Spirit did not intend. Since God has not designated one way or the other concerning praise to Him in the public gathering of God's people, then no Scripture is violated if we choose to sing and play an instrument in the assembly.

Again, if God had specified grape juice only in the communion, then the use of wine in the observance of the Lord's Supper would dishonor the command of God. Whether we use grape juice or wine, we violate no so-called principle of worship for the corporate worship of God's people. The same is true with the distribution of the bread in the Lord's Supper. Some fellowships among the one cup and non-Sunday school movement have divided over the breaking of the bread. Once more, if God had demanded that the bread in the communion be *pinched* and not *broken* into pieces, it would still be wrong to cite the Uzzah story to condemn those whose practices in the corporate worship do not coincide with their particular brand of orthodoxy.

Unfortunately the traditions of the church have made it difficult, if not almost impossible, to read the Bible without spectacles. In my preaching and teaching (fifty-eight years), I have discovered that the "faith of the fathers" has made it difficult for many Christians to approach the Scriptures with fresh eyes. The story of Uzzah and the Ark of God is about indifference for God's presence and His holiness. Hopefully, as a result of reading this story, Christians will grasp something of the holiness of God in their own relationship to the Creator of the universe and Savior of humanity. If the angels of God stood in awe, then should not we also stand in awe? Are we conscious of God's holiness? Is "holy, holy, holy" in our vocabulary? Do we honor God in our daily walk? Do we take the name of God in vain through our day-to-day conduct? Is God pleased with our reaction to His holiness? What does the story of Uzzah and the Ark of God convey to you? Again, we need to approach old texts through new eyes.

The next chapter (16) examines another Scripture in the arsenals of those who search for Scriptures that, on the surface, seem to uphold the necessity of every believer speaking the same thing, which ultimately means their brand of Christianity. First Corinthians 1:10 is examined in light of its context to demonstrate that the long-held traditions concerning the so-called unity-in- conformity mentality are not workable. The traditional interpretation by many believers within the Churches of Christ contradicts the overall teachings within the book itself.

[433]Cedric B. Johnson, *The Psychology of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 27.

16

Speak the Same Thing

> I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. (1 Corinthians 1:10)

Since this Scripture (1 Corinthians 1:10) is appealed to by almost every splinter group within the Churches of Christ to uphold its separation from other believers, it is necessary to analyze this quotation in order to understand what Paul sought to communicate to the Christians at Corinth. The objective in this chapter is not to condemn men and women who espouse an incorrect interpretation, but rather, the purpose of this in-depth study is to help individuals to understand the intent behind the words of Paul in order to bring about unity for which Jesus Christ prayed (John 17).

The words of Paul to the Corinthians are manipulated, not intentionally, by many Christians to justify their separation from other believers. This citation is employed by many well-meaning Christians to require conformity to a particular separation within the various Christian communities. The battle cry among many saints is: "agree with us or face excommunication." The more familiar quotation of this text is from the King James Version: "speak the same thing." With the voice of confidence, this Scripture is called forth to try to get everyone back into line with the status quo of a particular, or exacting, group.

But what does this well-known phrase mean? Does Paul set forth the suggestion that we must understand, or figure out, every passage of Scripture without distinction or differences? Is Paul advancing the notion that there can never be disagreements over doctrinal matters? Each division within God's people cites this verse to substantiate its conflict-ridden spirit. The current interpretation among many believers is an exhibition of exegetical dogmatism. In order to set the stage for a more accurate reading of Paul's now famous citation, it is necessary to give illustrations of how many equally God-fearing individuals who rely upon the same passage to validate their severance from others who do not kowtow to smuggled interpretations into the text, which, in my judgment, on the part of the interpreter, is without consciously thinking about the context,

EXAMPLES OF MISHANDLING AND CORRECT HANDLING

Old Paths Advocate

On December 1, 1932, Homer L. King (1892-1983), editor of the Old Paths Advocate (one-cup and non-Sunday school fellowship) cited 1 Corinthian 1:10 as justification for his position on rejection of other Christians who refuse to acquiesce to his "strange" interpretations of the Scriptures.[434] In this article, King calls attention to things that he objects to, but which other Christians do participate in. For instance, he writes:

> Is it not a fact that we are pretty well agreed on the things taught in the New Testament, but divided over the things not taught therein? Where in the New Testament do we read about Bible colleges, instrumental music in the worship, the

[434]See Homer L. King, "CAN'T WE AGREE ON SOMETHING," *Old Paths Advocate* LV, no. 10 (November 1, 1983): 1, 6.

> Sunday school with its human literature, classes, the modern pastorate, the multiplied societies to do the work of the church, and a plurality of drinking cups for each congregation? Are not these the major things over which we are divided? Did the church in the first century have these things? Was there ever a period of time in the history of the church that greater progress was made?[435]

According to King, in order for unity to exist among the people of God, we must conform to his comprehension of the Scriptures. If we disagree with his interpretation, we are not adhering to Paul's admonition:

> Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you; but *that* ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. (1 Corinthians 1:10)[436]

Today, seventy-six years later, this one-cup and non-Sunday school movement is still divided into many warring factions,[437] which is also true within the Churches of Christ as a whole. This particular group is divided into the bread-breakers and bread-pinchers, wine only versus the grape juice only, baptisteries versus non-baptisteries in the church building, the passing of the collection basket versus going to the communion table to "lay" by one's gift, the "order of worship" versus no required sequence for the so-called acts of worship (Acts 2:42), non-celebration of Christmas versus the Christmas' celebrators, divorce and remarriage versus the no-divorce for any reason, and so on. Why so much division?

Each fellowship of this one-cup movement cites this Scripture to others in order to bring about unity. But how is unity achieved according to this movement? It is not on the identity of who Jesus is, but rather upon agreement of their doctrinal understanding. This Scripture is applied by the Churches of Christ in general to anyone who dares to be different from their cherished beliefs. The motto of each distinctive fellowship within many churches is: "speak the same thing," but what does it mean to "speak the same thing"? Well, according to many devout believers, it simply means this: agree with my brand of Christianity or face expulsion from my group. Many, not all, believers within the OPA group are notorious for their factious spirit. It is my way, or no way at all. Remember, the Scripture says, "speak the same thing."

This Scripture is the battle cry for unity in conformity. As a result of this same mindset, King's son, Don King, now editor of the OPA, writes: "Listen, brethren: we believe it is wrong to use more than one cup. We believe people are going to be lost for using more than one cup."[438] Again, Kevin W. Presley, also associated with OPA fellowship, lambastes the position on "fellowship in diversity" as being in violation of 1 Corinthians 1:10:

> They say that since we can't agree upon the doctrines of our Lord, then they are irrelevant to our fellowship. . . . Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:10, "Now I beseech you, brethren by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that ye all SPEAK the same thing, and that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."[439]

The Restorer

We cannot limit this stretching of the text to just the one-cup believers, but this straightforward reading, without consideration of the context, is widespread among other sincere groups. One such writer from another camp is David L. Miller. In *The Restorer*, as guest editorial writer, he bemoans the fact that many advance the notion that the only kind of unity that is possible among believers is "unity in diversity." He says, "Such an

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[435] Ibid., 6.

[436] *The King James Version*, (Cambridge: Cambridge) 1769.

[437] For a brief history of this movement, see Dallas Burdette, "A Brief History of the One-cup and Non-Sunday School Movement" in Dallas Burdette, *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2008), 27-54.

[438] Don L. King, "Editorial: Proper Perspective," *Old Paths Advocate* LXVII, no. 9 (September 1995): 2.

[439] Kevin W. Presley, "NEO-DENOMINATIONALISM IN THE CHURCH OF CHRIST," *Old Paths Advocate* LXVII, no. 9 (September 1995): 1.

attitude overlooks important biblical principles."[440] One of the biblical principles he cites is 1 Corinthians 1:10. He correctly states, "Contentions sidetrack individuals from focusing upon Christ and His Word (1 Cor. 1:10-18)."

Miller is on target in his statement about "contentions sidetrack individuals," but, Miller, on the other hand, advances the notion in his essay that in order for unity to exist, then Christians must agree on doctrinal matters. Again, he writes: "the superficial, blind grasping for unity-at-all-cost mentality fails to recognize that division will always exist! According to the Bible, there will never be the kind of unity which some are compromising to achieve."[441] This statement about unity is an overstatement concerning "unity-at-all-cost." Ultimately, Miller believes that in order for us to be in conformity to 1 Corinthians 1:10, we must accept his understanding of the Scripture in order not to be sidetracked. This philosophy is rather naive. The *Old Paths Advocate* writers, too, will not fellowship *The Restorer* writers. *The Restorer* writers will not fellowship the *Old Paths Advocate* writers. How do they justify rejection of each other? Yes, 1 Corinthians 1:10 is utilized to bolster their position of departure.

J. Cleo Scott, another writer for *The Restorer,* writes an article on who can be fellowshipped. He, too, cites 1 Corinthians 1:10 to encourage an interpretation that he has, as well as many others, latched on to this favorite passage to maintain his traditions. He utilizes this Scripture against Christians who advocate the use of instruments in praise to God. It is in this regard that he pens:

> If one attempts to worship God by singing with an instrument invented by man, he is NOT walking in the light, nor walking by faith. Therefore, the child of God cannot walk with (have fellowship with) one who does. The same is true of many other religious innovations such as wearing robes, lighting candles, eating the Lord's Supper on Thursday, etc. When my brother joins himself to a religious group that does not walk in the light, then I cannot have fellowship with that brother. He is an erring brother and must be withdrawn from.[442]

He seeks justification for his actions toward those who cannot accept his twisting of the Scriptures. He cites 1 Corinthians 1:10 to give substance, so he thinks, to his allegations about who is or who is not walking in the light. If you agree with Scott, then you are walking in the light. If you disagree with Scott, then you are walking in darkness. Scott has been shaped by his traditions, not by the Word of God. The Churches of Christ, as a whole, need to do some rethinking in this area. The methods employed in the field of hermeneutics by many Church of Christ editors and writers need a theological overhaul. Much of what they say cannot be justified by the context. My remarks are not designed to question the integrity of the writers referred to in this chapter, but rather, to call attention to the need of reexamination of old texts through new eyes.

The Spiritual Sword

This religious paper, like *The Restorer*, advances the same type scenario that Churches of Christ, as a whole, advance in order to maintain their so-called purity—"we are the only ones that are true to the Word of God." Goebel Music seeks to prove, at least to himself, that men can agree on his concept of pattern theology, that is to say, his understanding of the so-called five acts of worship to be performed on Sunday morning in a so-call worship service. He issues a challenge to those who espouse unity in diversity and demands that all agree on doctrinal matters. Music asserts: "Proving and accepting 'pattern' theology. Man can speak the same thing (1. Cor. 1:10)."[443]

Jerry Moffitt also relies upon his interpretation of 1 Corinthians 1:10 to advance his objections to unity in diversity, which the Scriptures advance in spite of his hostility. Moffitt deals with this Scripture in the same haphazard way he employs other Scriptures in his short article. We stand amazed at the carelessness that Moffitt exhibits in his handling so many texts of Scripture. Before we can understand a particular verse, we must seek

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[440] David L. Miller, "Division," *The Restorer* 6, no. 8 (August 1986): 2.
[441] Ibid.
[442] J. Cleo Scott, "Whom May I Fellowship," *The Restorer* 6, no. 10 (October 1986): 4.
[443] Goebel Music, "The Challenge of 'Unity in Diversity,'" *The Spiritual Sword* 12, no. 1 (October 1980): 20.

to be aware of the whole. It is common sense to realize that we must interpret a verse in a book in light of its whole. We must comprehend the entire work before we can identify with or interpret a particular narrative or individual text. Two men, within the Churches of Christ (Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett), became aware of the context of 1 Corinthians 1:10 and called attention to current abuse of this passage to clobber other believers.

Moffitt poses the following question: "Will not adherence to God's word promote unity rather than division and diversity?"[444] Yes, God's Word does promote unity among believers, but this same Word also allows for diversity within God's community. The subtlety of Moffitt is again seen in his statement: "The sheer truth is, God not only gave us a faith (Jude 3), he expects us to be able to maintain UNITY when we receive that faith (Jn. 17:21; I Cor. 1:10; Phil. 3:16)."[445] The assumption on the part of Moffitt is that the "faith" that Jude speaks of is the interpretation that Moffitt attaches to the Scriptures. Remember each faction—over twenty-five divisions—claims Jude 3 as its own property.

Again, he says, "Love will cause us to walk in the light (I John 1:7), hold the pattern of sound words (II Tim. 1:13), and all speak the same things (I Cor. 1:10)."[446] Once more, he assumes that "to walk in the light" is to interpret the Scriptures according to his own interpretative community. He also identifies "sound words" as conformity to his brand of orthodoxy. Finally, he surmises that all believers can and will interpret the Scriptures the same, but, in all of his explanations, he never once analyzes the context. He just assumes that the authors (Paul and John) are agreeing with his understanding of Scripture.

As we seek to understand 1 Corinthians 1:10, we must consider the point of view of the author, that is to say, the meaning of the person behind the writing. A second factor in correct interpretation is that we must examine the intended reader, that is, the readers whom the author had in mind; and, as a final point, the ideal reader, that is to say, the reader who has sufficient information to interpret the writings correctly. Since the author spoke for God, then the writer's point of view and God's point of view are the same. It is obvious that the authors of the New Testament books, as well as the Old Testament books, assume that the readers will read the whole of their works in order to understand the particulars. Before we can embark upon the meaning of a particular verse, we must consider the overall meaning of the book. Even though I respect the above writers, nevertheless, we must dissent emphatically from their teachings on 1 Corinthians 1:10. Our ignorance of the context can lend an air of plausibility to our interpretation.

Mission Messenger

In 1965, Carl Ketcherside (1908-1989), editor and author, wrote an article that exploded like wild fire within the denominational Churches of Christ. He attacked the traditional interpretation of 1 Corinthians 1:10. He himself had earlier used this Scripture to hack to death anyone who disagreed with his understanding of God's Word. When Ketcherside went back to the context of this often-cited verse, he discovered that this Scripture was written to bring about unity, not division. Ketcherside states the matter firmly:

> Since every faction in the Christian spectrum, exists on the basis of a special emphasis, either upon a particular scripture or a specific idea, what is the basis for the cult of conformity and order of orthodoxy with the restoration movement of which we are heirs? I think it can be said without fear of denial that the basis of operation centers around 1 Corinthians 1:10. It is a twisting, warping and wresting of this scripture which leads them astray. It is astonishing that a passage written to offset division should be given an interpretation which will open and aggravate numerous festering wounds without ever closing a single one.[447]

This article is an in-depth discussion of the context of Paul's statement to the Corinthians. He correctly calls attention to the fact that the statement (speak the same thing) has nothing to do with conformity of opinion

[444]Jerry Moffitt, "IS UNITY-IN-DIVERSITY POSSIBLE?", *The Spiritual Sword* 15, no. 1 (October 1983): 18.
[445]Ibid.
[446]Ibid., 19.
[447]Carl Ketcherside, "Conformity or Diversity," *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 7 (July 1965): 101.

or interpretation.[448] This letter allows for differences within the body. Paul's letter to Corinth was designed to heal a gap that existed within the fellowship. He did not advance the notion that unity of opinion was prerequisite to unity or acceptance of one another. Just a casual glance at Chapter 8 in 1 Corinthians reveals that Paul refutes the general interpretation placed upon 1 Corinthians 1:10. There is room for differences within the body of Christ, but there is no room for division.

Restoration Review

In 1976, Leroy Garrett (1918-2015), editor and author, also addressed 1 Corinthian 1:10. He begins his analysis by asking several questions: "Does this passage enjoin believers to see everything in the Bible alike? Does it teach that we must see eye to eye on all points of doctrine, that there can be no honest differences of opinion?"[449] In this article, Garrett reveals the many issues over which sincere Christians are divided. After a brief listing of the many divisions within the Churches of Christ, he concludes that "1 Cor. 1:10 is made to apply only to those items that are peculiar to a particular segment."[450]

Many Christians are reluctant to reject ancient traditions, even when new evidence demonstrates that the old interpretation is not tenable. It is not uncommon for believers to jump to unfounded conclusions without looking at the context. Once more, Garrett puts it graphically: "The truth is that 1 Cor. 1:10, as abused in this manner, never has been, is not now, nor will it ever be consistently practiced by any believer. The reason is simple: it is impossible."[451] Just a casual glance at 1 Corinthian reveals that sameness of viewpoint is not in Paul's mind (1 Corinthians 8). In this letter, Paul never calls for conformity, but rather, he calls for love (1 Corinthians 13). The only kind of unity that Paul addresses in the church at Corinth is unity in diversity.

The first part of the chapter has sought to call attention to various authors who advance the negative as well as the positive aspects of Paul's now famous words. His statement, "speak the same thing," is employed by the various fragmented divisions within the Christian community, especially those Christians associated within the Churches of Christ in order to justify separation from other believers who refuse to subscribe to the particular beliefs of certain groups. The question that still confronts the reader is, what does the phrase really mean? The interpretation set forth by many believers is a notable exhibition of exegetical dogmatism.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

As we seek to understand this misunderstood phrase, we must seek to comprehend Paul's saying by consulting the context. It is in this vein that Milton S. Terry (1840-1914), American Methodist minister and educator, captures the heart of the context in the interpretation of any text. He writes:

> It often happens, also, that a writer uses a common word in some special and peculiar sense, and then his own definitions must be taken, or the context and scope must be consulted, in order to determine the precise meaning intended.[452]

"Context and scope" are principles that must be interpreted by Scripture. We must not use Scripture to nullify other Scriptures. As noted above, this verse (1 Corinthians 1:10) has been variously understood, and the most accomplished preachers and teachers have differed widely in their explanations. Since this confusion is prevalent among many of God's people, all dogmatism of tone should be excluded, and we, as God's people, should endeavor to place ourselves into the very heart and situation of those to whom this Epistle was first written. We should study with minute attention Paul's language as well as the overall thrust of this Epistle in order to understand the emphasis of 1:10.

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[448]Ibid., 102.
[449]Leroy Garrett, "That You All Speak the Same Thing," *Restoration Review* 15, no. 5 (May 1976): 282.
[450]Ibid., 283.
[451]Ibid.
[452]Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, nd. on original, republished 1974), 181.

Since such wide differences of opinions prevail, we cannot allow any deductive assumptions of what ought or ought not to be found. All such presuppositions are ruinous to sound interpretation. Paul should be permitted to explain himself. Thus, we should not be so full of ideas drawn from our own traditions as to desire to find what is not in the text.

Just a perusal of the Book of First Corinthians reveals that Paul had acquired a great deal of information from the various sources pertaining to the existing turmoil within the local body of believers at Corinth. Paul discloses some of this information: "My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you" (1 Corinthians 1:11). Paul closes his correspondence by naming three individuals: "I was glad when Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus arrived, because they have supplied what was lacking from you. [18] For they refreshed my spirit and yours also. Such men deserve recognition" (16:17-18).

The divisions that existed in this local body of believers were multifaceted, or many-sided. There were schisms over personalities (1:10-4:21), problems concerning immaturity (3:1-4), moral irregularities (Chapters 5-6), Christians going before pagan courts with other Christians (6:1-8), dealing with food sacrificed to idols (Chapter 8), superior knowledge (8:1-2), improper behavior during the Lord's Supper (11:17-24), and an unhealthy emphasis upon spiritual gifts (Chapters 12-14).

In this list of ruptures, we observe the elevation of certain leaders over other leaders (1:12-13). The Corinthians failed to recognize that all members were of the same body (12:12-13). These carnal Christians had formed factions. Paul appealed to unity in the name of Jesus. Listen to Paul as he issues his appeal to these believers: "I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought" (1:10).

Paul reveals that some had sided with various distinguished persons (1:12-13) rather than recognizing all as members of the same body (12:12-13). As a result of not having a proper understanding of Christianity, they formed factions. He appealed for agreement in "the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1:10). Listen to Paul as he goes right to the jugular vein of carnality:

> You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men? [4] For when one says, "I follow Paul," and another, "I follow Apollos," are you not mere men? [5] What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. (3:3-5)

The discord had to do with petty jealousies, which jealousies disrupted the Spirit's unity (Ephesians 4:1-7). Some would say, "I follow Paul" another would declare, "I follow Apollos"; another would verbalize, "I follow Cephas"; still another would utter, "I follow Christ" (1 Corinthians 1:12). Paul stressed that their "unitedness" was in Christ. They were to make the same effort toward maintaining the "unity of the Spirit" in the same way that the Ephesians were also to preserve the Spirit's unity. In the first six chapters of First Corinthians, Paul exposes the human-exalting schisms that fractured the harmony for which Jesus prayed (John 17). J. Sidlow Baxter (1903-1999), pastor and theologian, portrays the essence of the problem that originated Paul's plea for the Corinthians to "agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought" (1 Corinthians 1:10). Listen to Baxter as he writes with insight:

> The Pauline loyalist doubtless championed Gospel freedom and would claim primacy for Paul as the founder of their church. The Apollos clique were the intellectuals, carried away by the eloquence and seeming superiority of the brilliant Alexanderine expositor who had made such a flash among them since Paul's first visit. The Cephas block were presumably the Judaistically inclined, whose boast would be in Peter as the authoritative voice of the apostles and the mother church at Jerusalem. There was even a "Christ" party invidiously arrogating the Name, and saying, "I am of Christ" in a factious way which implied the inferiority of all others. Thus were the names of the Lord's servants and of the Lord Himself disputatiously played off against each other until the silly but serious rivalries threatened a fatal disruption of the church.[453]

[453]J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Bible: A Survey and Study of Each Book from Genesis to Revelation* [Six volumes Complete in One Volume], (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960, 1966), vol. 6, 95.

Paul did not preach one Christ and Peter another and Apollos another. There is but one Christ and one Savior and one Gospel (Galatians 1:6-9). The Christians at Corinth were looking at the Gospel from a philosophical point of view. They got their eyes off our Lord Jesus Christ and on the servants of our Master. This detour led to controversy. In Chapter 3 of First Corinthians, Paul accents that there must not be strife among God's sons and daughters.

What does it really mean to "agree" or "speak the same thing" (KJV)? Three words stand out in 1 Corinthians 1:10: (**1**) agree, (**2**) division, and (**3**) united. The KJV renders the Greek text as "speak the same thing." But what does this really mean? Whatever this Scripture is saying, it cannot contradict other clear passages of God's written Revelation. In other words, he is not saying that every Christians must see eye-to-eye on every verse in the sacred Writings. In Chapter 8 of First Corinthians, Paul did not expect all Christians to unite in any one verbal statement concerning their understanding of Scripture. Pay attention to Paul as he encourages unity in spite of differences of understanding:

> Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge.[a] Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. [2] **The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know**. [3] But the man who loves God is known by God. (8:1-3)

First Corinthians 13 sums up the very essence of what Paul addressed in 8:1-3. Again, listen to Paul as he writes:

> Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. **Now I know in part**; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. [13] And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. (13:12-13)

Their relationship to God was founded upon mutual sonship, not upon agreement upon all doctrinal interpretations. If we would read the entire Book of First Corinthians in one sitting, we would be able to see the whole picture of Christian unity. The traditional explanation of 1:10 does not harmonize with the totality of God's Word. Just a casual reading of Chapters 14-15 of the Book of Romans refutes this much abused passage. David Prior takes into custody the very core of Paul's admonition when he pens the following informative remarks:

> The appeal constrains three words with a political flavour—agree, dissension and be united. The first word means, literally, 'say the same thing' and is found on the first-century gravestone of a married couple, indicating, not the 'yes-man' mentality, but working together in a harmonious relationship.[454]

What is this "oneness" all about? What does it really mean to be "perfectly united in mind and thought"? Context is the great solver of this question. There are three kinds of context: (1) *immediate*, (2) *remote*, and (3) *larger*. One context speaks of the verses preceding and following. The second context speaks of the book itself, and the third context speaks of the Bible as a whole that addresses the same subject or issues. For the *larger* context, we should examine Luke's statement in the Book of Acts concerning the behavior of the believers toward one another. Luke writes: "All the believers **were one in heart and mind**. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had" (Acts 4:32). These believers did not claim his or her possession as one's own, but rather they shared with one another. "One in heart and mind" is the essence of what Paul stressed when he put pen to paper: "agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought" (1 Corinthians 1:10). Believers were to live in "a harmonious relationship" with one another—not party schisms, or cliques or factions.

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[a] Or "We all possess knowledge," *as you say*

[454]David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthian: Life in the Local Church*,, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1985), 35.

As we study Paul's plea, we cannot help but reflect upon his second letter to Corinth when he petitions once more for unity: "Finally, brothers, good-by. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you" (2 Corinthians 13:11). In spite of the theological irregularities or idiosyncrasies, they were still one body. It is in this same vein that Paul appeals to the Philippians to imitate the humility of Christ. Again, Paul goes right to the core of "be of one mind, live in peace":

> If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, [2] then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. [3] Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. [4] Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. [5] Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. (Philippians 2:1-5)

The Philippians were encouraged to "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ" (1:27). Jesus rebukes His disciples for jealousies running rampant among themselves. After setting them straight on what His mission is all about, He says, "Have salt in your selves, and be at peace with each other" (Mark 9:50). We would do well to read this entire chapter. Jesus confronts His disciples about their arrogant attitudes toward one another and about causing one to sin. Jesus stressed unity, brotherhood, and love—not contention. Conflict is resolved among God's people and peace restored when we recognize in one another a common responsibility to Jesus and the Gospel of the Kingdom.

An excellent commentary on 1 Corinthians 1:10 is found in 1 Samuel 18:1: "After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan **became one in spirit** with David, and he loved him as himself." The Corinthians were to be one in spirit because they were all baptized into one body by the one Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13). Earlier, Paul calls attention to the truth that Christians do not have to be in perfect harmony in their understanding or explanation of the Scriptures to be one in Christ (see Chapter 13 of First Corinthians). Paul, too, struggled for the Christians in Colossae:

> My purpose is that they may **be encouraged in heart and united in love**, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, [3] in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. [4] I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments. [5] For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit and delight to see how orderly you are and how firm your faith in Christ is. (Colossians 2:2-5)

The author of the Book of Second Chronicles also encapsulates the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:10, when he pens the following pregnant words: "Also in Judah the hand of God was on the people to give them unity of mind to carry out what the king and his officials had ordered, following the word of the LORD" (2 Chronicles 30:12). James, our Lord's brother, too, sums up the very essence of Paul's plea to the Corinthians when he pours out his heart for unity:

> But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. [18] Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness. (James 3:17-18)

CONCLUSION

We should always hesitate before superimposing upon 1 Corinthians 1:10 our own speculative and subjective interpretation. If a biblical text is torn out of its biblical context, the text can be heard to say things not in the text. Our interpretation ought to be checked by reference to the whole of the context. This chapter ("Speak the Same Thing") has no desire to attack those who follow a path without context. I am conscious that many expositors are no doubt good and godly men and women; but still, there are interpretations that may not, for all their sincerity, ring true to the biblical Revelation itself. The position of this study is **not** to condemn but to seek to lead Christians into a clearer understanding of God's Word. According to some, as noted above, their collective judgments, or interpretations, establish their views of God's truth into an unchangeable monument. In

other words, their decisions are free from error and become the unalterable law of the Medes and Persians. Once more, we should reread this Scripture through new eyes.

Chapter 17 (Unfruitful Works of Darkness) examines another Scripture (Ephesians 5:11) that is frequently taken out of context to uphold justification for separation from other believers who do not espouse the same doctrinal interpretation of the Scriptures as they themselves do in their own unique fellowship.

17

Unfruitful Works of Darkness

Paul, as he brings his Epistle to the Ephesians to a close, encourages the believers to "Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather to expose them" (Ephesians 5:11). Unfortunately, many Christians wrench this Scripture from its context and assign their own particular slant upon Paul's warning. The "unfruitful works of darkness" is often identified by the various oddities that certain fellowships adopt in their liturgy, that is to say, their liturgical worship service. For the first seventeen years of my preaching and teaching ministry, I cited this verse to condemn those who employed individual communion cups in the distribution of the Lord's Supper, participation in Bible study classes, instrumental music, and so on. Regrettably, I never read the context in order to determine what the intent of the author was.

Today, Ephesians 5:11 is still employed by many sincere believers to justify their castigation of other Christians who do not subscribe to their particular concept of a so-called worship service, which service consists of the performance of five ritualistic acts that have to be carried out in a precise manner in order for worship to be in Spirit and in truth. This passage is cited by many well-meaning Christians to justify their separation from other Christians who refuse to be traditional to the whims of a select few who hold to certain doctrines that are considered essential to salvation. The KJV employs the expression "unfruitful works of darkness" and exhorts the saints to have "nothing to do with" those who participate in these deeds of darkness.

If we wish to interpret Paul's phrase correctly, we need to begin reading with 4:17-19, which calls attention to our lifestyle. Listen to Paul as he writes:

> So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. [18] They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. [19]Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.

Paul continues to press home the concept that there must be a change in our external behavior. Immoral behavior is totally unacceptable for us who have accepted Christ as Lord in our lives. Again, we should pay attention to Paul as he zeros in on the person who has tasted the good Word of God:

> You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; [23] to be made new in the attitude of your minds; [24]and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (4:22-24)

Since we are new creations in Christ, this rebirth demands that we put off the old corrupted nature with its deceitful desires. We must now seek righteousness and holiness in our daily walk with God. Once more, Paul argues with forcefulness as he draws a distinction between the conduct of the pagans versus the actions of believers:

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.
[26] "In your anger do not sin"[a]: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, [27] and do not give the devil a foothold.
[28] He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need. [29]Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. [30] And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. [31]Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. [32] Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. (4:25-32)

These eight verses draw a distinction between behavior that honors God and behavior that does not honor God. We are to "put off falsehood," which is one of the "unfruitful deeds of darkness." Again, Paul cuts away all underbrush as he focuses on "unwholesome talk," which, too, comes under the umbrella of "unfruitful deeds of darkness." Yet again, he identifies the "unfruitful deeds of darkness" that we are to "have nothing to do with." Listen to Paul as he catalogues characteristics that should not be found among God's people: "bitterness, rage, anger, brawling, slander, and malice" (4:31). Over again, he warns the Ephesians:

But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. [4] Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. [5] For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.[b] (5:3-5)

We cannot read this list without a consciousness of Paul's definition of what he means by the "unfruitful deeds of darkness." Throughout this section, Paul draws a contrast between the "unfruitful deeds of darkness" and the fruitful deeds of righteousness that exalt God. We are "created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (4:24). We are to "Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (4:32). Again, he describes the fruitful deeds of light this way: "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children [2] and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (5:1-2). Following this strong statement about the believer's ethical conduct, he draws a contrast between two worlds:

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light [9] (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) [10]and find out what pleases the Lord. [11] Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. [12]For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret.
[13]But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, [14] for it is light that makes everything visible. (5:8-14)

As we approach any text, we must always be conscious of *ex post facto*, or after the fact, decisions that rule the way we interpret a text. *Ex post facto* (after the fact) methodology of interpretation explains why some interpret a passage in one way and not in another. For us to interpret this text (Ephesians 5:11) as dealing with "pattern theology," which deals with the way a worship service is conducted, we bring our religious training to the text and interpret this saying in light of our traditions. Many within the various segments within the Churches of Christ approach this text with strong subjective biases. In other words, they view this Scripture through colored glasses.

If we are to interpret the Word of God correctly, we must not approach the text as a series of unrelated sayings. Since many Christians move toward God's Word as unrelated verses, we witness a faulty or incomplete understanding of context. The atomistic methodology to biblical interpretation results in "proof-texting" as the means of establishing our beliefs. We must be conscious of bringing our own prior frame of reference from outside sources as we advance toward an understanding of the Bible.

On the surface, this Scripture, in isolation from its context, appears to give validity to the actions of certain individuals. Yet the traditional interpretation among many Christians within the Christian community is simply the subjective world of the interpreter. Almost every division within the known twenty-five or more

[a] Psalm 4:4
[b] Or *kingdom of the Christ and God*

distinctive religious bodies within the Stone/Campbell Movement cite this passage in order to give some soundness to their transactions of chastisement (withdrawal) from anyone who dares to disagree with the status quo of that particular religious fellowship.

The "unfruitful works of darkness," depending on which fellowship we are associated with, generally are associated with instrumental accompaniment in singing, solos, quartet singing, handclapping in the assembly, hand raising in the assembly, Sunday school, individual cups, manner of breaking the bread in the Lord's Supper, the church treasury, Bible colleges, and so on. In other words, if someone violates what one considers to be one of the so-called five acts (rituals) of worship on Sunday morning, then one must not have "fellowship with" that individual.

When we begin with a faulty perception of the context, we find our own expectations. What an author meant is the only true interpretation to any Scripture. In other words, the meaning of a text is the author's meaning. We must reject the traditional interpretation, not because it is private, but rather because it is wrong. If we fail to consider context, this failure leads to an interpretation of its own, which is totally cut off from its author.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I desire to give a brief overview of the Book of Ephesians. Needless to say, there is a certain amount of repetition in these final remarks. In the first three chapters of Ephesians, Paul develops the "one faith" that is mentioned in 4:5. In Chapter 2, he calls attention to their prior state of utter degradation (2:1-3). These individuals had followed the "ways of the world" (2:3). In Chapter 4, he exhorts the Ephesians to "live a life worthy of the calling you received" (4:1). They were taught "to put off your old self" and "to be made new in the attitude of your minds" (4:22, 23). Since we are created "to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (4:25), we should cast off "bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice" (4:31). In this same chapter, he warns us about "unwholesome talk" (4:29). Once more, he calls attention to "sexual immorality" (5:3). Paul stresses the point that there should not even be "a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people" (5:3).

Yet, it appears that some thought that purity of life really did not matter (5:6). "Let no man deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them" (5:6-7). Earlier, he says, "For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God" (5:5). Having given these instructions about right behavior, he then says:

> For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light [9] (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) [10]and find out what pleases the Lord. [11]Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. [12]For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. (5:8-12)

The "fruitless deeds of darkness" is the same as the "unfruitful works of darkness" (KJV). We are to have no participation ("fellowship") in these acts of darkness, "but rather expose them" (5:11).

I pray that God will help each of us to not use the Bible to prove a biased perspective. We must make sure that we do not read the biblical messages with a predetermined interpretive grid. One of the best ways to make sure that the Scriptures support our position is to ignore the context. Many Christians, unconsciously, lock themselves into what has been passed on from generation to generation. Our presuppositions are too often read into the Word of God rather than being read out of the Word of God. We need to relook at Ephesians 5:11 through new eyes.

The next chapter (18) explores another "pet" Scripture (Ephesians 4:5), which text concerns Paul's use of the phrase "one faith." In order to interpret this saying correctly, we must consult the context in making our decision as to what Paul meant by this expression. It is not uncommon for sincere believers to apply this turn of phrase to identify their particular brand of Christianity. Yet, the context does not lend support to this

interpretation. Chapter 18 explores the "one faith" in light of its context, which includes the **immediate** (verses preceding and following) context, the ***remote*** (the book itself) context, and the ***larger*** (other New Testament books) context. In the final analysis, we discover that the "one faith" is about the mystery of God, namely Christ.

18

One Faith

The "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5 is utilized by many well-meaning Christians to promote divisions within the body of Christ. Today, there are over twenty-five ruptures within the Stone/Campbell movement that lay claim to this passage as their own unique property. The "one faith" is **not** generally associated with Jesus as the object of faith, that is to say, God's way of salvation by grace through faith, but rather the "one faith" is usually linked with doctrinal creeds set forth by individual splinter groups. If one endorses instrumental music, then, according to the opposition, one is not adhering to the "one faith." In other words, for some believers, the "one faith" is acappella singing, not instrumental accompaniment. For one to sing with instrumental accompaniment during a so-called worship service is tantamount to treason against God.

This is just one of the numerous problems that carves up the Churches of Christ into various warring factions. For instance, there are some groups within the Churches of Christ that raise objections to the employment of individual communion cups and Sunday school.[455] According to this out-of-the-ordinary fellowship of believers, the users of individual communion cups and Sunday school are interrupting the "one faith" in Ephesians. This catalog of creedal statements for faithfulness is almost never-ending. The purpose of this chapter is to analyze Paul's "one faith" in light of its context in order to promote the unity for which Paul pleads. Having said this, this essay will also explore other books written by Paul, Luke, and Peter in order to lend a helping hand in comprehending more fully the meaning found in the Ephesian passage. This in-depth study will explore Ephesians 4:5 in light of its full context—the Book of Ephesians as a book. Douglas J. Moo (b. 1950), professor of New Testament at Wheaton College, sums up perfectly the need to read a book as a book, not Scriptures in isolation from their intended meaning:

> One of the biggest mistakes we can make in reading the Bible is to read paragraphs in isolation from one another. Certain devotional books, by selecting daily readings from all over the Bible, unfortunately encourage this practice. But the biblical authors meant their books to be read as books. Reading a paragraph chosen at random from the middle of, say, 2 Kings is something like reading a paragraph in isolation from the middle of the latest John Grisham novel. To be sure, the various biblical genres are not really comparable to a modern novel, and some of the genres require far less sequential reading than others (e.g., the Psalms). But the point is still valid. We can get the full meaning from any text of Scripture only as we appreciate the way the author intended it to function in the context of his whole book.[456]

One goal of this investigation of this misunderstood Scripture is to read Ephesians as a whole in order to determine how the word *faith* is employed. This chapter will seek to set forth the word *faith* in its context, that is, the entire book, not some isolated passage cited to give credence to our brand of orthodoxy. This subject about "faith" is of such vital importance for the preservation of the unity for which Paul advocates in his letter to the Christian community in Ephesus that it is necessary to develop this theme of "one faith" in order to assist individuals in keeping the "unity of the Spirit" (4:3).

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[455]In spite of these beliefs, this fellowship is composed of individuals who wish to be true to the Word of God. I personally know many men and women who are a part of this fellowship, and they are some of the godliest individuals that one can expect to meet.

[456]Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 271.

As we reflect upon Paul's seven "ones" for harmony among the Ephesians,[457] we quickly discover that number five ("one faith") is used by many Christians, as stated above, as a means of justification for disassociation from anyone who refuses to subscribe to their peculiar interpretation of Scriptures. This Scripture is wrenched from its context to justify separation from every individual who refuses to kowtow, or bow in deep respect, to the dictates of a particular factious group. Finally, this chapter will briefly investigate the Churches of Christ and their dilemma in lifting Ephesians 4:5 from the author's intended meaning.

EXEGESIS OR EISEGESIS?

We should step back and look at the Book of Ephesians as a whole in order to capture the intent of the author's use of the phrase "one faith." What is the focus of this expression? If we seek to make points that the biblical author did not aim to formulate, then we engage in eisegesis (reading into) rather than exegesis (drawing out from). In other words, when we engage in exegesis, we obtain the meaning of the passage by drawing the meaning from the context rather than reading into the text our own preconceived ideas, likes, dislikes, and so on.

We must learn to listen anew to the biblical text. We are so use to reading the Bible as many godly preachers and teachers have taught us that for us to deny traditions is tantamount to denying the Bible. As we approach Ephesians 4:5, we must learn to reevaluate and reinterpret what has been handed down to our particular group, or interpretative community. Because of tradition(s), we must seek to uncover the mind of the author through his own writings; otherwise, we can postulate various theories that are like a labyrinth[458] from which we can hardly find our way out of the tangle. This study seeks to remove a lot of the underbrush that has entangled so many of God's people.

GOD'S MESSAGE OF RECONCILIATION

The problem that hinders so many Christians is confusion over the word *faith* (πίστις pistis). The word *faith* can refer to that which is the channel through which the righteousness of God is imputed to men and women—subjective faith (inward faith—Romans 1:16-17), or the word *faith* can suggest the message of Good News proclaimed to the world—objective faith (the mystery—Ephesians 4:5). Also the word *faith* can indicate faithfulness on the part of individuals who put their trust in God's message of reconciliation. This chapter develops the thesis that the "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5 is the event of Jesus Christ Himself, also spoken of as "the mystery of His will" (1:9). In other words, the event is proclaimed as the Gospel, that is to say, the means whereby God saves the world. In my judgment, the "one faith" is not good news *about* the various creeds of Christendom, but rather it is Good News about salvation by faith in the finished work of Christ upon Calvary *for* men and women. The word *faith* can be used as a synonym for "the Gospel."[459]

MEANING OF ONE FAITH IN EPHESIANS 4:5

This study calls attention to the subjective (personal) element of faith as well as to two different interpretations of "faith" as objective, that is, (1) a message of salvation—Jesus as the object of private faith, and (**2**) a compendium of theology—a partisan creed. As we peruse the many great commentators, we quickly discover that the commentaries, as a whole, all seem to be in trouble concerning the exact meaning of Paul's expression—"one faith." There are basically three concepts, as mentioned above, advanced concerning the "one

[457]The seven ones are: one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord one faith, one baptism, and one God (Ephesians 4:3-6)

[458]Labyrinth: something extremely complex or tortuous in structure.

[459]Robert B. Hayes, *The Letter to the Galatians*, in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol., XI (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 211.

faith" in Ephesians 4:5: (**1**) the quality of faith in the individual [subjective], (**2**) Jesus is the "one faith" [objective], and (**3**) a compendium of theology [objective].

One of the most popular interpretations of this expression is that faith is a "compendium of theology,"[460] especially within the Churches of Christ. For many Christians, this concept of a compendium of theology, through isolation from context, appears to have some validity, but, on a deeper reading of the context of 4:5, we discover problems with this presupposition. This understanding of faith as a compendium of theology is the culprit that has splintered the body of Christ into painful splinters.

OVERVIEW OF THE WORD FAITH AS EMPLOYED IN SOME NEW TESTAMENT BOOKS

Before analyzing the word *faith* in Ephesians 4:5, it would be helpful to briefly observe this word *faith* in other New Testament books in order to arrive at a correct interpretation of this misused word. Just a casual review of the word *faith* in the New Testament reveals a sense that is not commonly maintained by many Christians within the Churches of Christ. Even though we encounter "faith" as a subjective condition of salvation (the means whereby one appropriates salvation by grace), still, we must never forget that the object of subjective faith is Jesus Christ. The two are wedded together. Subjective faith and objective faith are so intertwined throughout Scripture that it is sometimes difficult to determine which is which. In Paul's first letter to Corinth, he speaks of their subjective faith: "so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power" (1 Corinthians 2:5). As a result of Paul's message and preaching, the Corinthians believed (subjective faith). Then he develops the substance of his message and preaching, which in essence is the "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5. Listen to Paul as he elaborates on the object of their faith:

> **We do**, however, **speak a message of wisdom** among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. [7]No, **we speak of God's secret wisdom**, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. [8]**None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory**. (1 Corinthians 2:6-8)

It is in this same vein that Peter, too, speaks of subjective and objective faith in his discourse on the Day of Pentecost. He emphasized subjective faith—faith in Jesus—as prerequisite to salvation. Yet, this subjective faith had Jesus as its object. This subjective faith had to do with justifying faith, that is to say, faith is the means whereby God imputes to man and woman His righteousness. Faith is the means whereby we appropriate the salvation offered to us by grace. Yes, Jesus is the object of subjective faith, a faith that results in eternal life. Once more, Peter tells the people: "And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Acts 2:21). We must exercise faith in the "one Lord." Once we have been put in a right relationship with God through personal faith in Jesus, then we seek to bring our lives into harmony with our new relationship with God through Jesus (Romans 6). It is in this same vein that Paul writes to the Philippians:

> Whatever happens**, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ**. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel. (Philippians 1:27)

[460]Each of the twenty-five or more divisions within the Churches of Christ sets forth its own "compendium of theology" that we must adhere to in order for us to be recognized as a faithful child of God. Each faction maintains that its understanding of Christian dogma is the "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5. This misunderstanding has opened the floodgates for division on every street corner.

FAITH" IN THE BOOK OF ACTS[461]

As we peruse any book of the New Testament, we must determine the meaning to be attached to the term *faith*. For example, how is the word *faith* employed in Philippians 1:27? In this verse, Paul speaks of "The faith of the gospel." The context reveals that "the faith of the gospel" is nothing other than the message of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus. The context is the deciding factor. This is also true as we turn our attention to the word *faith* in the Book of Acts. As we seek to understand subjective and objective faith, we must always look at the context. For instance, Luke gives insight into the subjective element of *faith* in his reporting of the selecting of the seven deacons to oversee the work of charity (Acts 6:1-6). In this section, Luke speaks of Stephen as "a man **full of faith** and of the Holy Spirit" (6:5). The word *faith* in this context appears to be subjective faith. On the other hand, Luke calls attention to "the faith" as objective in his recounting of how the Word of God spread: "So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became **obedient to the faith**" (6:7; see also Romans 1:5; 10:16; 16:26; 2 Thessalonians 1:8). In these verses, "obedience to the faith" means the acceptance of Jesus as the means of salvation.

In this section (Acts 6:1-6), we discern the word *faith* employed in two different senses. We must look at the context in order to arrive at the sense to be attached to the word *faith*. Since the object of subjective faith is belief in Jesus, we can surmise that a large number of priests accepted Jesus as the Anointed One of God, which is what it means to be "obedient to the faith." Sometimes the phrase "obedience to the faith" (ὑπήκουον τῇ πίστει Juphkouon th pistei "obeyed the faith" [Acts 6:7]) can also refer to one's ethical behavior.[462] Here again, we must always consult the context in trying to ascertain the correct meaning. Luke also records the words of Peter to the Sanhedrin concerning "the faith," even though the words *the faith* are not employed, nevertheless, the following response to the Sanhedrin by Peter reveals that this is the substance of his statement: "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (4:12).

FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Island of Cyprus

The Book of Acts covers a period of approximately thirty years, beginning with Jerusalem and ending in Rome. Approximately eighteen years after Peter's message about salvation through Jesus, Paul and Barnabas and John Mark began their first missionary tour. Their first adventure was on the island of Cyprus (about AD 48). They landed at Salamis and proclaimed "**the word of God**" in the Jewish synagogues (13:5). After this proclamation about Jesus, both men went to Paphos (13:6) and were immediately summoned by Sergius Paulus, the proconsul, because "he wanted to **hear the word of God**" (13:7). What did he hear? He heard about "the

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[461]This section does not cover Paul's third missionary journey. I suggests that you read the entire Book of Acts for yourself and give special attention to all of the sermons reported by Luke. This reading should give you a feel for subjective faith and objective faith. One implies the other; one cannot, in its strictest sense, divorce one from the other. Even though one may lay emphasis on one without mentioning the other, still one must never forget that ultimately the two belong together.

[462]This phrase "obedience to the faith" is interpreted by various scholars as the "content of faith" (objective), but, on the other hand, some scholars assume that "obedience to the faith" is dealing with ethical behavior. We cannot deny that there must be obedience to the faith in that sense. But, the question is, is that the meaning attached to the phrase by Paul? See John Murray *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 13, for faith as an act of obedience, or commitment to the Gospel of Christ. On the other hand, Kasemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 15, takes the phrase to be equivalent to the message of salvation. He says,

> The obedience of faith means acceptance of the message of salvation (Bultmann, *Theology*, I, 89f.). The missionary situation has given both noun and verb their predominant meaning, and the characteristic linking of faith and obedience in Paul has a meaning which is not primarily ethical but, as is especially clear in 2 Cor. 10:4-6, eschatological: When the revelation of Christ is accepted, the rebellious world submits again to its Lord. This understanding of faith corresponds to the apostle's Kyrious Christology.

faith" through the proclamation of "the word of God." Immediately upon hearing this word, Luke informs his readers that Elymas, the sorcerer, "tried to turn the proconsul from the faith" (13:8). In verse 8, we immediately detect that "the faith" is employed objectively. Luke uses synonymous terms to describe the message of salvation. Whether we refer to the message of salvation as "the word of God" or "the faith," we are speaking of the same Christ event in this context.

Pisidian Antioch

On this same tour, the three set sail for Perga in Pamphylia, but John Mark returned to Jerusalem (13:13). Paul and Barnabas continued this missionary trip through Pisidian Antioch (13:14—275 miles NW of Paphos). During this period of evangelism, Paul preached "the faith." Luke informs his readers that Paul preached Jesus. In the course of his sermons, he said, "Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that **through Jesus** the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. [39] **Through him** everyone **who believes** is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses" (13:38-39).

Iconium

From there they went to Iconium (14:1, 71 miles SE of Antioch) and preached. Luke writes: "a great number of the **Jews and Gentiles believed**" (14:1). This is subjective faith on the part of the Jews and Gentiles. What did they believe? They believed the message about God's grace (14:3), which is also called the "good news" (14:7). In other words, they accepted Jesus as God's way of salvation. Jesus is always the object of our personal faith. In verse 3, this Gospel (the faith) is called "the word of his grace," but, in verse 7, this message is referred to as the "good news." Again, one observes the various phraseologies employed by Luke to express the same thing.

Lystra

After leaving Iconium, they left for Lystra (14:8, 14 miles S of Iconium) and preached the "good news" about salvation through Jesus (14:15). Some Jews came from Antioch and stirred up the people against Paul. As a result of this confrontation, the citizens stoned Paul and left him for dead (14:19), the disciples got Paul and took him back into the city.

Derbe

The next day, both Paul and Silas journeyed to Derbe (14:20, 46 miles SE of Lystra). Luke says, "They **preached the good** news in that city and won a large number of disciples" (14:21). After preaching Jesus in Derbe, Luke reports to his readers that Paul and Barnabas revisited the cities of Lystra, Iconium and Antioch (14:21). Luke summarizes the results of their return to these cities with the following words: "strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to **remain true to the faith**" (14:22). Once more, we observe the phraseology employed to convey the same concept. To say that they "preached the good news" (v. 21) is the same as saying "the faith" (v. 22 = the gospel). "The faith" in verse 22 is objective; this "good news" appears to be the "one faith," according to context, in Ephesians 4:5.

Earlier, Paul in his sermon to the Jews of Pisidian Antioch identifies what "the faith" is all about: "From this man's (David) descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised" (Acts 13:23). After this announcement, he again zeros in on the very heart of the Gospel (the faith):

> Therefore, my brothers, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. [39]Through him everyone who believes is justified from everything you could not be justified from by the law of Moses. (13:38-39)

These verses describe "the faith" in an objective sense. Jesus is the object of subjective faith (who believes).

SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY

Philippi

Just a brief overview of Paul's second missionary journey also reveals the same scenario. Luke reveals that Paul, Silas, and Timothy wanted to go to the region of Phrygia and Galatia, but the Holy Spirit prevented them from "preaching the word in the province of Asia" (16:6). Eventually, the trio, along with Luke, went into Europe to preach the Good News of God. One of Paul's first converts was Lydia. Luke says that God opened her heart to respond to "Paul's message" (16:14). Following this encounter, a girl followed Paul and Silas shouting: "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling the way to be saved" (16:17). Following this episode, Paul and Silas were arrested and thrown in prison (16:23), Luke informs his readers of an earthquake and the conversion of the jailor. The jailor inquired as to what he must do to be saved. Paul's response was: "Believe in the Lord Jesus" (16:31). But, Luke does not stop with just the phrase "believe in the Lord Jesus"; but rather, he then told him about the One he should believe in. Listen once more to Luke as he recounts this particular event: "Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house" (16:32).

Thessalonica

After this episode, Paul went to Thessalonica, then to Berea, and then to Athens (17:1-32). In Thessalonica many Jews and Gentiles rejected "obedience to the faith." During this second missionary journey, while in Corinth, Paul wrote his second epistle (AD 52) to that congregation in which he issued a warning to those who refused to heed the message of salvation through Christ:

> God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you [7] and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. [8]**He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus**. [9]They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power [10]on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you. (1 Thessalonians 1:6-10)

For one not to "obey the gospel" is to reject Jesus as God's Anointed One. It is the same as that which John addresses when he writes:

> He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. [11]**He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him**. [12]**Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God**—[13]children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. (John 1:10-13)

From the Thessalonian correspondence, we quickly learn that many Jews were not "obedient to the faith," which equals Paul's phraseology "obey the gospel." For one not to obey the Gospel was equivalent to one not being obedient to the faith, which simply means that one does not receive Him.

Berea

Wherever this missionary group converged, they immediately went to the Jewish synagogue to tell them about the message of salvation (Acts 17:11). Luke informs his readers that the Bereans received the message with eagerness (17:11). The Jews from Thessalonica learned of Paul's behavior in Berea and went there to disrupt the "preaching" of Paul. Luke says that "Paul was **preaching the word of God**" at Berea (17:13). We cannot read about the events of Paul and his traveling companions in the various towns without cognizance of

the various synonymous expressions used to describe the Gospel of God. In this short section dealing with the activities concerning the Word, we observe that the preaching about Jesus is called "the message of salvation" (17:11) and "the word of God" (17:13).

Athens

In Athens, Luke identifies the message as "the good news about Jesus and the resurrection" (17:18). Wherever Paul and his companions went, they preached the "one faith" that Paul speaks of in Ephesians 4:5. This "one faith" is the "good news about Jesus and his resurrection." For the full text of Paul's encounter with the Athenians, we should read Acts 17:16-34. Toward the end of Paul's proclamation about Jesus, he says to the Athenians:

> "For he has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. **He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead**." [32]**When they heard about the resurrection of the dead**, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject." [33]At that, Paul left the Council. [34]A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others. (17:31-34)

Some who heard the message about Jesus and His resurrection were like some of the Jews from Thessalonica; they refused to "obey the gospel" (see 2 Thessalonians 1:8). Some, after hearing the message of salvation, were "obedient to the faith" (see Acts 6:7; Romans 1:5; 16:26). We stand almost awestruck as we catch a glimpse of the various ways the preaching of Jesus is described. The terminology employed helps us to promptly observe that no one term was used exclusively for the "one faith" that Paul chooses in Ephesians to describe the "mystery of God," which is none other than Jesus, the hope of glory.

Corinth

After his visit and preaching in Athens, Paul went to Corinth (Acts 18:1). Immediately Luke focuses his camera on Paul to give Theophilus, the one to whom the book was actually written (1:1), some details as to the activities of Paul in Corinth: "Every Sabbath he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks" (18:4). In the meantime, Timothy and Silas joined Paul from Macedonia (18:5). After their arrival, Luke says that Paul now exclusively devoted himself to preaching about Jesus. Once more, we get a clear insight into the core, or heart, of the message of Paul to the Corinthians. Listen to Luke as he captures the gist of the message of salvation:

> When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ. [6]But when the Jews opposed Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest and said to them, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am clear of my responsibility. From now on I will go to the Gentiles." (18:5-6)

After Paul moved the base of his operations from the synagogue to the house of Crispus, the synagogue ruler, we discover that God appeared to Paul to give him the spiritual resolve to continue to teach the Corinthians "the word of God" (18:7-12). Paul was informed by God to "keep on speaking, do not be silent." Later, when Paul wrote to the Corinthians (AD 55), he reflected upon his stay: "When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the **testimony about God**. [2] For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except **Jesus Christ and him crucified**" (1 Corinthians 2:1-2). Then as Paul closed this letter, he once more reminded them of his message:

> Now, brothers, **I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you**, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. [2] **By this gospel you are saved**, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. [3]For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, [4] that he was buried, that **he was raised on the third day** according to the Scriptures, [5] and that he

appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. [6]After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. [7]Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, [8]and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. (15:1-8)

"FAITH" IN THE BOOK OF ROMANS

About ten years after the first missionary journey (AD 57), Paul writes to the Romans about this faith, which he calls "my gospel" and "the revelation of the mystery":

> Now to Him who is able to establish you according to **my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ**, according to **the revelation of the mystery** kept secret since the world began [26]but now has been made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures has been made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, **for obedience to the faith**— [27]to God, alone wise, *be* glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen. (Romans 16:25-27, NKJV)

Again, we perceive synonymous expressions employed to describe faith in its objective sense: (1) "my gospel," (2) "preaching of Jesus Christ," (3) "the revelation of the mystery," and (4) "obedience to the faith." In the Book of Romans, we witness Paul employing "faith" sometimes in a subjective sense, but at other times, it is employed in an objective sense. The context is the deciding factor. Just as Paul concludes his Book with "obedience to the faith" (**εἰς ὑπακοὴν πίστεως**, *eis hypakoēn pisteōs*, "for obedience of faith," 16:26) so he begins his Book with the same phraseology (1:5). In 1:3-4, Paul describes the message of the Gospel, in verse 5, he describes what God expects of individuals who hear the message about Christ. This is basically the same scenario that Paul expresses in Romans 10:1-4. In these verses, Paul calls attention to the Jews' refusal of Jesus as the means of receiving God's righteousness. Thus, Paul expresses this rejection of "obedience of faith" as "did not submit to God's righteousness" (10:3). The full context of this section is:

> Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. [2] For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but **their zeal is not based on knowledge**. [3] Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, **they did not submit to God's righteousness**. [4] Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. (10:1-4)

Obedience of Faith
Equals
Submission to God's Righteousness through Jesus

"Obedience of faith" means acceptance of the message of salvation by grace through faith. Whenever Paul speaks of submission to God's righteousness (Romans 10:3), he is essentially saying the same thing in 1:5. It is through faith that we accept the righteousness of God. Subjective faith in Jesus is the means whereby God chooses to make salvation available to us (1:16-17). Listen to Paul following his discourse on Abraham and faith:

> Therefore, since we have been **justified through faith**, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, [2] through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. (5:1-2)

"Through faith" is employed in a subjective sense, but this subjective faith must have for its object Jesus. It is, "We have peace with God **through our Lord Jesus Christ**." Jesus is "the faith." The faith is not a collection of twenty-seven books; the faith is not instrumental music; it is not acappella singing; it is not grape juice or wine only in the Lord's Supper; it is not bread breaking or bread pinching in the observance of the Lord's Supper; **it is the belief that Jesus is the Son of God**, the Savior of the World. This is "the faith" that Paul preached wherever he went. Paul expresses this concept in a most forceful way in his letter to Rome: "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (Romans 4:25).

Paul employs "faith" in a subjective sense as well as an objective sense (see Romans 10:1-17). Again, the context is the determinative factor. In writing Romans, we cannot help but wonder if Paul had not reflected upon the words of Jesus to Nicodemus. In Christ's conversation with Nicodemus, He sets forth subjective and objective faith as essential to eternal life. One's subjective faith must have Jesus as its object. Pay attention to Jesus as He explains to Nicodemus how we come to have eternal life:

> For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that **whoever believes in him** shall not perish but have eternal life. [17] For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. [18] **Whoever believes in him** is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. (John 3:16-18)

The object of belief is Jesus. As we read carefully Ephesians 4:5, the context must determine whether the "one faith" is subjective or objective. When we move toward Ephesians 4:5, we detect that many scholars also speak of this "one faith" as subjective, but, at the same time, they call attention to Jesus as the object of this "one faith." Some scholars advance the notion that the "one faith" refers to that quality of faith in the individual, which enables him or her to believe. Yet, the subjective element appears to be expressed already in the "one Lord," the fourth of the seven ones. This concept of the "one faith" as personal (subjective faith) seems to be at odds with the context,[463] even though we must have subjective faith in order to receive the righteousness of Christ. Whatever the answer is to a proper interpretation of "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5, we must never forget that we cannot ultimately separate personal faith from its object (Jesus). On the other hand, we can never separate Jesus from personal faith if we expect salvation

It goes almost without saying that there must be subjective faith in Jesus, but, at the same time, we ought to be conscious as to how Paul employs "one faith" in this context. In other words, there must be faith (subjective) in "the faith" (objective), which is Christ. In Ephesians, Paul employs both usages of the word *faith*. What we turn up in the reading of Ephesians is that subjective faith and objective faith (Jesus the object of faith) are like two sides of a coin. Both must be involved for salvation. Yet, in Ephesians 4:5, the context seems to use "one faith" for the "Gospel." It is in this vein that Klyne Snodgras pungently captures the intent of Paul's use of the phrase:

> "One faith" looks back to the explanation of the gospel in 2:1-10, but reference here is not the act of believing. "Faith" is used here by metonymy for that which is believed, the content of the faith. The statement means there is only one gospel.[464]

The context of Ephesians 4:5 does not appear to use pistis in the subjective sense as utilized by Paul in Romans 1:16-17:

> I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of **everyone who believes**: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. [17]For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed**, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last**, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

This passage (1:16-17) speaks of faith in a subjective sense. God has chosen faith as the means whereby man receives salvation. In Romans 4, Paul speaks of Abraham's faith: "What does the Scripture say? 'Abraham **believed God**, and it was credited to him as righteousness'" (verse 5). This faith is subjective faith on the part of Abraham. Once more, Paul expresses this subjective faith as the means whereby God imputes to man His righteousness:

> And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them (4:11)

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[463]Lloyd-Jones, *Christian Unity: An Exposition of Ephesians 4:1-16* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 107.

[464]Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 199.

Paul begins this epistle (Romans) with a brief synopsis of "the faith" (1:3-4) and then concludes his remarks with submission to that faith (1:5). Keep your mind on Paul as he captures the very heart of the gospel and one's response to Jesus ("the faith"):

> Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—[2]the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures [3] regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, [4]and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. [5] Through him and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. (1:1-5)

The NIV's translation of 1:5 is understood by many as subjective faith, not objective faith as presented in this study. We cannot determine from the translation which meaning the translators intended to convey. In other words, did the translators understand the phraseology as meaning ethical obedience that comes from faith or obedience that results in the acceptance of Jesus as God's Anointed One for the salvation of the world? We are not denying that there must be ethical obedience to the faith once for all delivered to the saints, but the issue in Romans 1:5 is: Is "obedience of faith" the message of salvation? It is in this same vein that Douglas J. Moo oscillates, so it seems to me, between subjective and objective faith in 1:5.[465] Since Paul is not here to clarify the issue for the Christian community, then Christians today must try to arrive at a correct application through the context. Is Paul addressing the same issue in his examination of the Jews' rejection of Jesus? Pay attention to Paul as he deals with "obedience of faith" in Romans 10:8-17:

> But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, **the word of faith we are proclaiming**: [9] That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and **believe in your heart** that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. [10] For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. [11]As the Scripture says, "**Anyone who trusts in him** will never be put to shame." [12] For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, [13] for, "**Everyone who calls** on the name of the Lord will be saved." [14]How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And **how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard**? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? [15]And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" [16] **But not all the Israelites accepted the good news**. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" [17]Consequently, **faith comes from hearing the message**, and the **message is heard through the word of Christ**.

"The word of faith we are proclaiming" is Jesus. This is the same message about Christ in verse 17. Many Israelites rejected the "good news" (verse 16) about Jesus as God's way of salvation. "The word of faith" would be equivalent to the "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5. Robert Haldane (1764-1842), in his monumental commentary on Romans, grappled with this very issue:

> *To the obedience of faith.*—Paul, as an Apostle, was commissioned to preach the Gospel in order to the obedience of faith. Some understand this of the obedience which faith produces; but the usual import of the expression, as well as the connection in this place, determines it to apply to the belief of the Gospel. Obedience is no doubt an effect produced by that belief; but the office of an Apostle was, in the first place, to persuade men to believe the Gospel. This is the grand object, which includes the other. The Gospel reforms those who believe it; but it would be presenting an imperfect view of the subject to say that it was given to reform the world. It was given that men might believe and be saved. The obedience, then, here referred to, signifies submission to the doctrine of the gospel.[466]

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[465]Douglas J. Moo, *Romans*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 41-43. He has some excellent comments, but, at the same time, the phrase, so it seems, in light of its context, still bears the earmark of submission to the message of the Gospel.

[466]Robert Haldane, *An Exposition of Romans*, reprinted 1971 (Marshalltown, Delaware: The National Foundation for Christian Education, original date not given), 30-31.

"FAITH" IN THE BOOK OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

A few years earlier (AD 54), Paul wrote to the Corinthians about "the gospel I preached to you" (1 Corinthians 15:1). But he does not stop with just that statement; he continues to define what it was that he preached (15:2-4). As Paul wraps up this epistle, he writes: "Be on your guard; stand firm in **the faith**; be men of courage; be strong" (16:13). Paul begins this epistle with both objective faith (the message) and subjective faith (belief on the part of those who responded to the message of salvation:

> For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, **God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.** [22] Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, [23] but **we preach Christ crucified**: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, [24] but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. [25] For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength. (1:21-25)

"The foolishness of what was preached" is objective faith (Jesus crucified), but the words, "to save those who believe" is subjective faith. The Corinthians were to "stand firm in **the faith**." One can hardly read "the faith" in the Corinthians passage without reflecting, once more, upon the context in Ephesians 4:5, which appears to focus on Jesus as God's liberating initiative to bring about peace and break down the wall of partition that separates Jews and Gentiles (Ephesians 2:11-22). One must emphasize, and not forget, that subjective faith has as its object the Anointed One of God. "The faith" in 1 Corinthians 16:13 and the "one faith" (μία πίστις, *mia pistis*) in Ephesians 4:5 and "obedience of faith" in Romans 1:5 and "the faith" in Colossians 1:23 seem to refer to the same thing, namely, the gospel of hope. In the Colossians' passage, Paul writes:

> If indeed you continue in **the faith** (**τῇ πίστει**, *tē pistei*), grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister. (Colossians 1:23) [NKJV]

The context of this statement—"continue in the faith"—appears to be Christ, the hope of glory. As one reflects upon the fuller context, one quickly discovers that Paul identifies "the faith" as Christ. Take note once more to Paul as he expounds upon his thoughts in 1:23:

> I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the church, [25]of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, [26]**the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations**, but now has been revealed to His saints. [27]To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of **this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory**. [28]Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. [29]To this *end* I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily. (1:24-29) [NKJV]

From this context, it appears that "the faith" equals "the mystery" and "the mystery" equals "Christ, the hope of glory."

Even if we interpret, as many commentators do, "one faith" as subjective in Ephesians 4:5 and not as objective, we must also observe that these same scholars also advance the idea that Christ is the object of this subjective faith, not some creedal statement as postulated by the various religious bodies. For example, H.C.G. Moule addresses the controversy this way as he seeks to correct the erroneous view that the "one faith" is a creed, unless we speak of this creed as Christ:

> Πίστις (*Pistis*) is here explained not of the Christian's creed but of the Christians trust. I believe this to be required, or at least strongly suggested by the general use of the word **πίστις** (*pistis*) in the writings of Paul. Hardly ever, if ever, does he use it distinctly in the sense of creed. Of course some "creed," however brief is required in order to "trust," if it is to be trust in the trustworthy Object. But this is not in question where we are examining the use of the word **πίστις** (*pistis*).

If faith is subjective, Moule is saying that Jesus is still the object of this subjective faith. Jesus is the creed. If "one faith" were creedal in nature, then this "one faith" would be Jesus, the hope of glory. Even though Moule interprets "one faith" as subjective, he still speaks of Christ as the object of this "one faith." He does reject the "one faith" as a compendium of theology, that is to say, a partisan creed. In this same vein of "one faith" as subjective, Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene A. Nida are forthright in their criticism of interpreting the "one faith" as a creed, that is to say, "a compendium of theology":

> One faith: the Christian message is one, not many, and it calls for the same faith, belief, commitment from all who accept it. It is doubtful that here the Greek word for "faith" means "creed" (as Murray would define it). In this context one faith must refer to "one way in which we may trust God" or . . . " trust Christ."[467]

These two scholars deny that the "one faith" is creedal in nature, but, on the other hand, both appear to be saying that the "one faith" is subjective with Christ as its object. We cannot deny that there is subjectivity on the part of the one who looks to Christ as the author and finisher of his or her salvation, but if we place emphasis upon a written creed (objective—compendium of theology) and not upon "the faith," namely Jesus, then we weaken, to some extent, the thrust of Paul's arguments concerning Jesus as the unifying factor in reconciling the world unto Himself.[468]

It is difficult for scholars to choose between the subjective and objective sense, especially since it is almost impossible to separate the two concepts in an absolute sense. Neither concept can be far from the other. William Hendrickson expresses his views about the subjective nature of the "one faith," but he also cautions that we cannot separate the two:

> Favoring the objective sense are Westcott and Lenski ("one truth"), though it is only fair to state that the latter does not entirely exclude the subjective meaning. He says, '"One faith' includes our personal believing, but the stress is on the Christian faith as such, on what constitutes its substance." Simpson refuses to choose. Hodge and Greijdanus accept the theory that the term as here used combines subjective and objective faith. Abbott, Grosheide, Roberson, and Scott favor the subjective sense (footnote 101).[469]

This controversy appears, so it seems to me, to be the case of scholars not reading the book as a book. They isolate this passage (Ephesians 4:5) from its context.[470] The seven ones are an absolute proof of unity. It appears that Paul is setting forth something that is outside oneself (Jesus as the object of our subjective faith) in order to withstand objective attacks against Jesus as God's way of salvation, which is the "one faith." Just a perusal of the Book of Ephesians reveals that "faith" is employed in both senses in this epistle. Subjective faith in Jesus is the means by which God has chosen to redeem humanity (see Ephesians 1:13; 2:8; 3:12, 17; see also Romans 1:16-17). Salvation is by God's grace through faith in Jesus (Ephesians 2:8). In Ephesians 4:5, Paul, so it seems, is appealing to something that can unite fallen humanity. Whether one interprets the "one faith" as subjective or objective does not detract from Paul's emphasis about unity. In other words, it is only subjective faith in Jesus as its object that can unite humanity into "one new man" (2:10-18).

Faith in Jesus puts everyone on an equal footing, not knowledge. If "one faith" refers to a compendium of creedal statements, whether written or unwritten, then unity cannot exist.[471] This faith, even though objective, is something that puts one into a right relationship with God. Jesus is the only one who can accomplish this feat. He is the message of salvation. The backdrop of this epistle does seem to indicate that the "one faith" is objective. Whether one interprets the "one faith" as personal (inward faith) or objective (Jesus), we cannot be

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[467]Robert G. Bratcher and Eugene A. Nida, *Paul's Letter to the Ephesians*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1982), 96.

[468]See William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Ephesians* New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967), 186.

[469]Ibid., 187.

[470]This concept will be dealt with more fully under an analysis of "faith" in Ephesians.

[471]It is not uncommon for some individuals within the Churches of Christ as well as other religious bodies to deny that they have a written creed. On the surface this sounds excellent; but this is not true. The various religious journals advance a certain doctrinal stance, and then this becomes in essence the written creed for that particular body of believers. To disagree with the editors and church leaders of the various religious journals is, often times, tantamount to disagreeing with God Himself.

too dogmatic in our presuppositions. In the Ephesian epistle, Paul discusses both subjective and objective faith. Kenneth S. Wuest (1893-1962), New Testament Greek scholar and professor of New Testament Greek at Moody Bible Institute, also advances the idea that the "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5 is subjective. In the following statement by Wuest, he also calls attention to the fact that the "one faith" is not some human creed. He writes:

> "Faith" is not the Christian Faith as a system of doctrine and its respective responsibilities. It refers to the principle of faith by means of which all the saints enter into salvation.[472]

We can concur with Wuest's statement that the "Christian Faith" cannot be a "system of doctrine." As we read the scholars, we discover that over and over the scholars draw attention to the fact that the "one faith" cannot be a religious creed. Why? Just a perusal of the religious scene reveals that a "compendium of theology" can never unite. This observation is self-evident from the many divisions that currently exist within the Stone/Campbell Movement. Carl Ketcherside (1908-1989), author and editor, goes right to the heart of the cancer that inflicts almost every division within the Churches of Christ who interpret the "one faith" as creedal in nature, that is, partisan creeds, not Jesus as the creed:

> It is a startling commentary on the destructive violence of the party spirit when one realizes that otherwise good and gentle men are betrayed into equating the faith which all of us share in Christ Jesus with narrow partisan tests of communion.[473]

Both Wuest and Ketcherside reject the "one faith" as a creedal statement concerning "a compendium of theology." Even for those scholars who interpret the "one faith" subjectively, they see the "one faith" as subjective in the sense that "faith" is the one means whereby God saves humanity through Jesus. Even with this understanding though, the scholars still set forth the notion that Jesus is the object of one's faith. In other words, "faith" is the means, or the instrument, through which God imputes His righteousness to those who put their trust in Jesus as Lord. As stated earlier, it is very difficult to draw a sharp distinction between subjective faith and objective faith, which in essence are simply two sides of the same coin. One necessitates the other. It is by faith (subjective) that all share in the "one body" of Christ. Once more, Carl Ketcherside captures the essence of this "one faith" or "the faith" in his precise commentary on Ephesians 4:5. He correctly writes that the "one faith" is Jesus and not a compendium of theology:

> Compendium of moral principles, a code of ethics, or a compilation of laws. . . . It is the firm conviction that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God and that he "was put to death for our trespasses, and raised for our justification" (Romans 4:25). [474]

"FAITH" IN THE BOOK OF EPHESIANS

Objective Faith (Jesus)

As stated above, we must consider the context of Ephesians 4:5 in order to ascertain the intended meaning Paul attaches to this particular phrase—"one faith." He begins his epistle with the thought that God had blessed the Ephesian Christians with all spiritual blessings in Christ (1:3-6). He informs them that it is in

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[472]Kenneth S. Wuest, *Ephesians and Colossians in the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 96. Wuest may be correct in his analysis, but the whole context of the passage does not seem to bear out the conclusions of many godly scholars. If we would read the entire Book of Ephesians, we would discover that Paul, prior to his statement in Chapter 4 and verse 5, develops the scheme of God's redemptive history in Jesus Christ. Everything centers on Jesus as the One who unites fragmented humanity. He is our peace who has broken down the middle wall of partition.

[473]Carl Ketcherside, "The One Faith," *Mission Messenger* 27, no., 10 (October 1965): 149.

[474]Ibid., 148.

Christ that we obtain redemption through the blood of Jesus (1:7). He also calls attention to the mystery of God as to how He could justify sinful humanity:

> And he made known to us **the mystery of his will** according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, [10] to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. (1:9-10)

F. F. Bruce (1910-1990), Bible scholar and professor of biblical criticism and exegesis, equates the "mystery of Christ" with the "revelation of Jesus Christ" (cf. Galatians 1:12).[475] In other words, the "mystery of Christ" equals the "revelation of Jesus Christ" and the "gospel" equals both. Bruce says, "Christ is himself the mystery of God (Col. 2:2; cf. Col. 1:26-27)."[476] This "mystery" is defined in Ephesians 2:14-16, which is the creation in Christ of "one new man" (verse 15). This background helps to explain the phrase "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5.

As Paul reflects upon God's method of salvation, he reflects upon the Gospel and their response:

> And you also were included in Christ when **you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation**. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, [14]who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory. (1:13-14)

This "word of truth" and the "gospel of your salvation" are equivalent expressions to the "one faith." Paul prayed that their eyes might be opened to understand something of the greatness of what God had accomplished in raising them from the dead (1:18—2:1-10). He further develops the fact that they were "dead in transgressions" (2:5, KJV). For instance, he informs them that

> **God raised us up with Christ** and **seated us with him** in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, [7] in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, **expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus**. [8]**For it is by grace you have been saved, through fai**th—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— [9] not by works, so that no one can boast. [10]For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (2:6-10)

The object of this saving faith is Jesus. After Paul zeros in on "the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation" (1:13, KJV), he then states their response to this gospel: "For this reason, ever since I heard about **your faith in the Lord Jesus** and your love for all the saints, [16]I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers" (1:15-16). Again, Paul does not stop there; he continues to develop this gospel with the following words: "And God **raised us up with Christ** and **seated us with him** in the heavenly realms **in Christ Jesus**, [7] in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, **expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus**" (2:6-7). As cited above, Paul again expresses the means of salvation: "For it is by grace you have been saved, **through faith**" (2:8).

In the second chapter of Ephesians (vv. 11-22), Paul describes what the "one faith" is all about. Then in Chapter 3, he develops this "one faith" even further by describing the "one faith" as the "mystery," which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. It is here that T. K. Abbott has a relevant word: "One Lord, Christ; one faith, of which He is the object, one in its nature and essence; and one baptism, by which we are brought into the profession of this faith."[477] Whether we interpret faith as subjective, as Abbott, or objective (Jesus), the meaning is basically the same. In other words, even if faith is used subjectively, the object of our personal faith is in Jesus, not some compendium of theology advanced by some group within the Christian community.

The object of faith is none other than Jesus the Messiah. Again, Paul emphasizes the object of subjective faith with the following words: "For **through him** we both have access to the Father by one Spirit" (2:18). Paul,

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[475]F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 313.

[476] Ibid.

[477]T. K. Abbott, *The Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians*, The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, nd, latest impression 1991), 109.

throughout this short epistle, widens the "one faith." In Chapter 3, verses 2-13, he discusses the "mystery" that he introduced in the beginning of this epistle (1:3-13). In Chapter 3, he writes: "This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise **in Christ Jesus**" (3:6). He then follows this statement with the following thought: "**In him** and **through faith in him** we may approach God with freedom and confidence" (3:12). The Greek text reads "through **the faith** of (in) him" (**διὰ τῆς πίστεως αὐτοῦ**, *dia tēs pisteōs autou*). This comment by Paul is similar to a statement made some years earlier to the Galatians:

> We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' [16] know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by **faith in Jesus Christ**. So we, too, **have put our faith in Christ Jesus** that we may be justified **by faith in Christ** and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified. (Galatians 2:15-16)

The words "by faith in Jesus Christ" (**διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ**, *dia pisteōs Christou*, "through faith of [in] Christ") emphasize both the subjective (inward faith) and objective faith (Jesus). Then, in this same verse, Paul says, "So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus" (**ἡμεῖς εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεύσαμεν**, *hēmeis eis Christon Iēsoun episteusamen*, "We in Christ Jesus believed"). Paul does not stop there; he does not want his readers to misunderstand how an individual is put in a right relationship with God. Again, he nails the point to the wall, so to speak: "justified by faith in Christ" (**δικαιωθῶμεν ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ**, *dikaiōthōmen ek pisteōs Christou*, "we might be justified by faith of [in] Christ"). F. F. Bruce does well to remind believers that

> It is by this surpassingly rich grace of God, then, that salvation is secured for men and women. As in v. 5, "you have been saved" is equivalent to "you have been justified." What Paul says here about salvation he says elsewhere about justification, which is freely bestowed by God's grace (Rom. 3:24) and received "not on the ground of legal works but through faith in Jesus Christ" (Gal. 2:16). "Through faith" here implies Jesus Christ as the object of that faith, as he is explicitly its object in Gal. 2:16 and Rom. 3:22, 26.[478]

In Ephesians 3:12 and 3:17, Paul, in speaking of faith, utilizes the definite article before faith in both verses.[479] Verse 17 reads: "So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love" (**διὰ τῆς πίστεως**. *dia tēs pisteōs*, "through the faith"). Can we proclaim, or preach, "the faith"? Paul in his epistle to the Galatians writes:

> Later I went to Syria and Cilicia. [22] I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. [23] They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now **preaching the faith** he once tried to destroy." (Galatians 1:21-23)

These verses show that "preaching the faith" can function for Paul as a synonym for "the gospel." Richard B. Hays, professor of New Testament at Duke Divinity School in Durham, North Carolina, correctly calls attention to the import of this passage (v. 23) in Galatians:

> The expression "proclaiming the faith" in v. 23 also shows that "the faith" can function for Paul as a synonym for "the gospel." "The faith" is not just a matter of inward attitudes of the heart; it alludes to the substantive content of Christian preaching, as summarized in kerygmatic formulas such as Gal 1:3-4 and 1 Corinthians 15:3-5. This observation will prove important in interpreting other references to "faith" (**πίστις,** pistis *pistis*) later in the letter.[480]

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[478]F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians*, 289.

[479]The definite article is often confusing in trying to arrive at the significance or its emphasis. The following note on the definite article in First Timothy 3:9 by Jerome D. Quinn and William C. Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, Eerdman's Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 273, is worthwhile reading:

> 9. but persons who hold the *mystery of the faith*. This marks one of fifteen uses of *pistis* in the PE with the article (versus eighteen anarthrous uses). Just as the appearance of the article does not designate the faith in terms of content in the PE, so the absence thereof does not signal simply the personal act of believing. The use (or nonuse) of the article has less to do with systematic theological distinctions than with the grammatical and rhetorical patterns of Hellenistic Greek.

[480]Richard B. Hayes, *The Letter to the Galatians* in The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol., XI (Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 217.

Objective Faith (Compendium of Theology)

Sometimes it is helpful to state a proposition in the negative in order to shed more light on its real meaning. The following is a brief analysis as to why I reject the traditional interpretation of the "one faith" as objective in the sense of a "party interpretation" of Scripture. As we glance at the "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5, we have to determine in what sense Paul is employing the expression "one faith." Is it a "compendium of theology" or is it "Jesus"? Upon a close reading, at least to me, we are cognizant that "faith" is objective, namely, Jesus. Yet, in spite of the context, many still want to hold on to "one faith" as representative of their particular brand of Christianity, but the question remains as to the meaning that we should attach to this objectivity. Among many Christian communities, the most prevalent concept is that it is objective in the sense that it represents a theological party creed, but this philosophy is riddled with insurmountable problems.

CHURCHES OF CHRIST AND THEIR DILEMMA

To illustrate the misapplication of Ephesians 4:5, this chapter names godly men who seek to be true to God, but, at the same time, we discover that these men are promoting division rather than the unity for which Paul calls for in Ephesians. The unity for which Paul calls in the Ephesian Epistle is based upon faith in the one Lord Jesus. Garland Elkins (Church of Christ), on the other hand, identifies the "one faith," not as faith in the one Lord, but rather his particular understanding of the so-called five acts of worship. Elkins writes an article on "The Silence of the Scriptures" in which he bemoans the fact that there are fellowships of believers who do not concur with his brand of orthodoxy. In this essay he discusses the so-called five acts of worship. In the following lengthy citation, he sets forth his understanding of the "one faith" as being associated with a worship service with five prescribed rituals within the Churches of Christ:

> These five acts of worship were the *only acts* of worship that the early church practiced. We search in vain for any other acts of worship enjoined upon Christians today. Therefore to count beads as an act of worship is sinful. . . . The Bible does not say, "Thou shalt not use mechanical instruments of music in worship." . . . One of the major differences between the churches of Christ and the Christian churches is: true churches of Christ are governed by what the Bible says. Christian churches are governed by what the Bible does not say. . . . The aim of true churches of Christ throughout the world is to restore Christianity as it was in the first century A.D. . . . In the final analysis whether people obey or disobey God is a matter of regard or disregard for the word of God. The only possible way for us to be united is to follow the simple plan of "speaking where the Bible speaks and by remaining silent where the Bible is silent" (1 Peter 4:11). . . . No one was ever asked, "Are you Protestant or Catholic?" for such did not exist. No one asked, "To which faith do you belong?" for there was only one faith (Eph. 4:5). In a divided religious world the pleas of true churches of Christ everywhere is for a complete restoration of the Lord's church. We plead for people to go back over all the dark ages of corruption, to discard man-made names, creeds, doctrines, and commandments of men in the plan of salvation and worship.[481]

Elkins (1926-2016) identifies the five acts of worship as: (**1**) teaching, (**2**) praying, (**3**) giving, (**4**) Lord's Supper, and (**5**) singing.[482] Elkins labors under the impression that God has ordained a worship service in which five acts (rituals) must be performed in a prescribed manner in order for worship to be "true worship."[483] For those who do not conform to his particular interpretation of Scripture, they are not contending for the "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5.[484] Not only does he identify the "one faith" with five acts of worship, but he also identifies the Church of Christ as the "one faith." He excludes any other religious denomination from being a part of the "one faith." For us to be in the "one faith," we must be identified with his social gathering.

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[481]Garland Elkins, "The Silence of the Scriptures," *The Spiritual Sword* 5, no., 1 (October 1973): 19-20.
[482]Ibid., 19.
[483]Ibid.
[484]Ibid., 20.

He says, as cited in the above citation: "No one was ever asked, 'Are you Protestant or Catholic?' for such did not exist. No one asked, 'To which faith do you belong?' for there was only one faith (Eph. 4:5)." He excludes everyone from the "one faith" except his own splinter group. In his exposition of the "one faith," he fails to take into consideration that the distinctive religious body known as the Churches of Christ, which came out of the Stone/Campbell Movement, of which he is a part, did not exist prior to Alexander Campbell, one of the principle founders of this Reformation Movement.

On the other side of Elkins' unique fellowship, there is another exclusive association that is known as the one-cup and non-Sunday school movement within the Churches of Christ. This group of Christians also cites this same verse to condemn Elkins. Why? Well, according to their understanding of the New Testament, he is not adhering to the "one faith," which happens to be the one-cup, non-Sunday school, grape juice only, bread pinchers (the bread must remain in one piece—no fragmentation), and so on. They, like him, identify the "one faith," not with Jesus, but rather with their odd interpretation of the so-called worship service with its five rituals. Just a casual reading of Ephesians reveals that the "one faith" is not some creedal statement issued by the Churches of Christ, but rather, it is the "one Lord." Jesus is the "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5.

This "one faith," as illustrated above, is the message of the Gospel, or the Word of God. If we interpret "one faith" as objective faith in the sense of a written creed, we again confront an impossible blockage. There is difficulty in applying this expression to a particular body of truth as is generally advanced by many within the Churches of Christ as well as other religious bodies. In seeking an answer to the above dilemma, we must inquire as to the following question: Is Paul speaking of an objective body of truth? Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981), protestant Christian minister, carefully calls attention to the difficulty:

> In the eyes of these teachers 'one faith' means that Christians adopt and subscribe to one of the great Confessions of Faith, such as the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England., or the Westminster confession of Faith, or the Heidelberg Catechism. Faith here, they say, means a complete outline of what we believe, a compete compendium of theology.[485]

Even though some Christians reject the many Confessions of Faith written by other believers, nevertheless, many of these same Christians adhere to an unwritten creed that is just as dogmatic and divisive as the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, and so on. When we set forth a doctrinal standard by which all must adhere to or face excommunication, we immediately catapult a movement that will fracture at the drop-of-a-hat. If we define "one faith" as dogmatic theology propounded by some meticulous group of believers, then there has never been nor will there ever be "one faith." If "one faith" means agreement upon all doctrinal issues, then there was not even "one faith" in the days of the apostles. Thus, Leroy Garrett (b. 1918), author and editor, correctly points out:

> On and on it goes. We are judged more by what doctrines we hold to than by the hold we have on Jesus. One is not "faithful" unless he is acappella or non-class or amillennial or non-cooperative or direct support. A congregation is not of "the faith" unless it serves the Supper in a certain manner or restricts its budget to non-institutional programs. "Obedience to the faith," a beautiful scriptural concept, is made to apply to every opinion imaginable, and if one does not kow-tow to a particular opinion, held to so dearly by the party, he is branded as *unfaithful*. And so we "convert" each other to our own sects, announcing to the world that someone has found "the faith" and is no longer in error. This usually has little to do with a person's relationship to Jesus as Lord. If one leaves us, we presume that he has "departed from the faith," when in fact he just might leave us for the sake of the faith.[486]

We cannot take the "one faith" to mean complete agreement about an absolute digest of doctrinal declaration in the written Word. For us to make the "one faith" mean total compliance in doctrinal matters, then our understanding would violate the very intent of this epistle. One thing that the scholars agree on is this: the "one faith" is not a system of dogmatic theology. Most scholars rule out this objective sense of a "compendium

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[485]Lloyd-Jones, *Christian Unity: An Exposition of Ephesians 4:1 to 16*), 108. I am indebted to Lloyd-Jones for his exposition of this phrase.

[486]Leroy Garrett, "The Nature of Faith," *Restoration Review* 18, no., 6 (June 1976): 303.

of theology," period. In the early church, there were differences in understanding concerning many issues, but they were not accused of preaching another gospel, unless they added something to Jesus as God's way of salvation. For example, Paul's letter to the Corinthians reveals that Paul was conscious that within the Christian community believers were at various levels in understanding, but they were never accused of departing from "the faith." We should listen in on Paul as he discusses limited knowledge within the Corinthian congregation. He writes:

> Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. [2] **The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know**. [3] But the man who loves God is known by God. (1 Corinthians 8:1-3)

Within this short paragraph, Paul calls attention to the fact that no one knows everything, as he or she ought to know. Even though some laid claim to "we all possess knowledge," nevertheless they were warned that knowledge can puff an individual up, but, on the other hand, love can build one up. It is true that some were right and some were wrong in their views concerning idols; yet, in spite of this deficiency in knowledge, Paul drove home the point that if one loves God, then God knows this individual, in spite of famine in discernment. Just a perusal of the eighth chapter of First Corinthians reveals ignorance, on the part of some, concerning the Lord Jesus. Listen once more to Paul as he calls for toleration for the weak:

> Yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. [7] **But not everyone knows this**. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat such food they think of it as having been sacrificed to an idol, and since their conscience is weak, it is defiled. [8] But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do. (8:6-8)

Paul is conscious that there is just one God, the Father, and one Lord Jesus Christ, but he goes on to say, "Not everyone knows this." For a second time, we wonder why Paul did not accuse the weak Christians of abandoning the "one faith." How did Paul deal with the ones who did not get the picture flawlessly? Again, we should pay attention to Paul as he seeks to capture the very heart of unity among the Corinthians:

> Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. [10] For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? [11] So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. [12] When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. (8:9-12)

Paul, too, deals with differences within the congregation at Rome. This epistle to the Romans is quite revealing in that Paul details how Christians are to get along, even when there were different viewpoints. Chapters fourteen and fifteen of Romans go to the very core of Christian unity in spite of a lack of understanding. Listen to the following admonitions:

> **Accept him whose faith is weak**, without passing judgment on disputable matters. [2] One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. (Romans 14:1-2)

> **Who are you to judge someone else's servant**? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. (14:4)

> One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike**. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind**. (14:5)

> **Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you**, in order to bring praise to God. (15:7)

If an individual refuses to practice the spirit of toleration toward the weak, Paul warns the Christians at Rome to keep an eye on the brother who refuses to make allowances for differences (16:17). It is difficult for

many Christians to read the Scriptures with correct understanding because of their traditions. The faith of the fathers frequently becomes the watchword of orthodoxy. We must continue to hammer away at the traditions that divide God's people. Another Christian writer who does not subscribe to the "one faith" as equivalent to the message of the Gospel is Goebel Music. Music, like so many leaders within the Churches of Christ, applies Ephesians 4:5 to the theological creed of his particular party. He, too, laments that

> The great and beloved body of Christ today is being ripped apart by the sawblade of insidious doctrines, one such being that of "Unity in Diversity." This is one of the most treacherous, double-tongued, underhanded, delusive, guileful, cunning, slippery, intriguing, crooked, questionable, fishy and deceitful doctrines and must be met with a head-on onslaught! It is totally unbiblical, completely sectarian and has nothing at all to do with New Testament Christianity. . . . Before there can be real unity, there must be a unity of faith. Paul, in Ephesians 4, tells us of the "Unity Platform." Unity in diversity is an insidious doctrine and the answer is simple. The Bible never talks about, anywhere, diversity of faiths! However, it talks repeatedly about THE ONE FAITH! And we are told to believe the same thing so we can speak the same thing (1 Cor. 1:10).[487]

His overall views concerning Ephesians 4:5 are not supported by the context. We cannot question his statement: "Before there can be real unity, there must be a unity of faith."[488] But the problem with his exposition is that he equates the "unity of faith" with his particular brand of orthodoxy. Again, he is correct when he writes, "The Bible never talks about, anywhere, diversity of faiths!" But what does Music mean by the "diversity of faiths"? He is writing about Christians who use instrumental music, and Christians who advance the biblical concept of "unity in diversity" as holding to another gospel. To strengthen his religious reasoning, he incorrectly applies 1 Corinthians 1:10 to reinforce his misapplication of Ephesians 4:5.

Just a brief reading of First Corinthians, as demonstrated above, reveals his misapplication of 1 Corinthians 1:10.[489] Whatever Paul is saying in this passage cannot possibly be what Music is saying. Otherwise, this passage would contradict Chapters 8 through 13 of 1 Corinthians. The "one faith" is the message of the gospel, not instrumental music, not Sunday school, not grape juice only, not wine only, not Bible colleges, and so on. He identifies the "one faith" with his understanding of the Bible in references to these issues. Focus, once more, on Music as he seeks to elaborate on his concept of the "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5:

> Anything else is a splattered unity, or perhaps I should say, union. It is a systematized and sectarianized unity for joining the church of your choice and bringing the instrument in the "back door." There is just one faith, just like there is one Lord. There are no more faiths than there are Lords.[490]

Yet again, we cannot deny his statement: "there is just one faith, just like there is one Lord." What we do deny, and we must deny, is his equation of the "one faith" with his identifying mark of prevailing attitude—my interpretation and application. In essence, he interprets the "one faith" as his understanding of the Bible. When we advance dogmatic theology as the "one faith," then this belief system opens a Pandora's Box. This incredible philosophy, advanced by Elkins and Music, has sliced the body of Christ into warring factions that are constantly at each other's throats. The interpretation that is in vogue among many Churches of Christ and other religious denominations forces the philosophy of "unity-in-conformity," not "unity-in-diversity." In fact, most of the party journals within the Churches of Christ belittle "unity-in-diversity" as of the devil.

If we reflect upon the consequences of the outcome of the "one faith" as a compendium of theology, then we must acknowledge that there is something wrong with the traditional interpretation. The "one faith" cannot possibly be a complete system of theology. Christians can no more all think alike on every subject than they can all look alike. Carl Ketcherside, as cited earlier, correctly says:

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[487]Goebel Music, "The Challenge of 'Unity in Diversity,'" *The Spiritual Sword* 12, no., 1 (October 1980): 19, 21.

[488]Ibid., 21.

[489]For an analysis of 1 Corinthians 1:10, see Chapter 16 (Speak the Same Thing) in this book (Old Texts through New Eyes), 317-331.

[490]Ibid.

> The one faith is not a compendium of moral principles, a code of ethics, or a compilation of laws. It is not a collection of letters, even though divinely authorized and produced by agency of the Spirit. It is the firm conviction that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God and that he "was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification" (Romans 4:25).[491]

We observe that Ketcherside defines the "one faith" as Jesus. The traditional interpretation of Ephesians 4:5 fractures the body of Christ rather than unites the body of Christ. Within the Churches of Christ there are as many *faiths* as there are splinter groups if we interpret "one faith" with doctrinal issues. When we interpret "one faith" as *acappella* singing, instrumental music, wine only, grape juice only, one container in the Lord's Supper, individual cups in the Lord's Supper, breaking bread, pinching bread, orphan homes, Bible colleges, located preachers, baptisteries, women not cutting their hair, women wearing hats in the assembly, and so on, we create an atmosphere in which division proliferates. Another citation from Garrett is to the point:

> This is the nature of faith. It is rooted in a Person, the one who is the bread come down out of heaven. It is not loyalty to any doctrinal system, however praiseworthy be that system. It is a mark of sectarianism to regard faith as assent to a particular set of tenets. Our *faithful* brothers and sisters are all those everywhere who are in Christ Jesus, implicitly trusting in him as the Lord of their lives.[492]

For many Christians the "one faith" amounts to "one opinion." The "one faith" does not consist of a so-called new law, which is generally interpreted as the New Testament. As a whole, within the Churches of Christ, the "one faith" is boiled down to its lowest common denominator—one opinion. Alexander Campbell, the founder of the denominational Church of Christ[493] also known as the Stone/Campbell Movement, once said with his typical pungency:

> The Apostle says, 'There is one body, one spirit (sic), one hope, one Lord, one faith, one immersion, one God and Father of all.' **But nowhere is it said in the sacred book, There is *one opinion***. If however, unity of opinion were desirable, to attain it, we must give the greatest liberty of opinion; for though once theory with us, it is now matter of experience, that the more stress is laid upon unity of opinion, the less of it, and the more division; and the less regard paid to it, the less emphasis laid upon it, the more we will have of it. This is founded in a law of the human mind, on which it is unseasonable and unnecessary to expatiate ("expound"—RDB).[494]

God has never made faultlessness in knowledge a condition of salvation. If He had, none could be saved. Just a casual glance at 1 Corinthians 8 and Romans 14 and 15 dispel any such belief. This analysis of the subjective (personal faith, which is essential for salvation) and objective (compendium of theology, which is not essential for salvation) faith brings us to the very heart of the "one faith" included in the seven ones, which are essential for Christian unity.

As we study the various factions within the Churches of Christ, we quickly realize that an interpretation of "the faith" depends upon each controversial company of saints. No two parties define "the faith" the same way. Instead of "one faith," as stated earlier, there are as many faiths as there are splinter groups. Ketcherside has rightly picked up the folly of assigning a meaning to the "one faith" as a compendium of theology:

> To postulate that one must have perfect knowledge of every detail of revelation is to require inerrancy and infallibility and to demand that he be God. This is what I call "the Haman's gallows argument." If it is affirmed that fellowship with ourselves is contingent upon knowing all we know and understanding everything as we do, then our fellowship with God is dependent upon our knowing all that God knows and understanding everything as He does. Since no one is rash enough

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[491]Carl Ketcherside, "The One Faith," *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 10 (October 1965): 148.

[492]Leroy Garrett, "The Nature of Faith," *Restoration Review* 18, no., 6 (June 1976): 305.

[493]Many Christians in this movement identify the Churches of Christ as having started in AD 33. Those outside this particular body of believers are not Christians. If we wish to understand the true nature of the church, I suggest that everyone read Emil Brunner, *Misunderstanding of the Church* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1952).

[494]Alexander Campbell, "To Mr. William Jones, of London, Letter IV," *Millennial Harbinger* 6, no. 3 (March 1835):111-112.

to claim this for himself, he admits he is not in fellowship with God, and damns himself by the argument he concocted to deny others. "By what judgment you judge you will be judged."[495]

CONCLUSION

The "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5 is Jesus. This faith proclaims what Jesus has done for humanity. In other words, this "one faith" is the very heart of the Gospel. When one ponders upon this "one faith," one mulls over the centrality of the cross of Jesus. This "one faith" is about the Atonement and Resurrection of Christ in which He put away the sins of the world. This "one faith" is about the central truth of the Gospel—Jesus who gave Himself for our sins. The "one faith" that Paul addresses in the Ephesian Epistle is the very essence of the Gospel—"who reconciled us to himself through Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:18). We can only appropriate Christ through faith (personal). We believe that God sent His Son to die for our salvation.

This faith is something upon which we must agree. This "one faith" must be a belief in the "one Lord." This is the message that is at the very heart of the "one faith" that Paul emphasizes in the unity section (Ephesians 4:1-6). This "one faith" cuts across all barriers and unites all who put their trust in Jesus for liberation. Again, Paul expresses this "one faith" is the beginning of his first letter to Corinth:

> It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. [31] Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 1:30-31)

How do we appropriate this "one faith"? It is through faith, or trust, in Jesus, not through works. This is the substance of Paul's letter to the Romans.

> I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. [17] For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "**The righteous will live by faith**." (Romans 1:16-17)

The Gospel is the "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5. This is the one message that Paul carefully and thoughtfully develops in the Book of Romans. The first four chapters of Romans are dedicated to this great theme of justification by faith. For Paul, justification begins and ends with faith. It is all God's doing. Prior to the coming of Christ, Paul emphasizes that the Jews were under Law, but with the coming of Christ something new came. Paul explains this "one faith" this way:

> But now **a righteousness from God, apart from law**, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. [22] **This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe**. There is no difference, [23] for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, [24] and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. [25] **God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement**, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— [26] he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. (Romans 3:21-26)

Paul had just painted a rather dismal picture of humanity under Law. Then he uses two of the greatest words in all of the human language—"**but now**"—to express the "one faith." The Book of Romans (AD 57) is an excellent commentary on the "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5. Take note once more to the words of Paul as he zeros in on the very core of the "one faith":

> "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: [9] That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. [10] For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. [11] As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." (Romans 10:8-11)

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[495] Carl Ketcherside, "The One Faith," Mission *Messenger* 27, no. 10 (October 1965): 152.

What is the "word of faith" that Paul proclaims? It is (1) "Jesus is Lord" and (2) His Resurrection. We must respond to the message of the Cross ("one faith") with a vital personal faith (1:16-17; 4:3). How does this living or subjective faith in Jesus come about? This kind of faith is generated through the proclamation of the Gospel: "Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (10:17). We who hear this announcement **about** Christ and believe will be saved. Listen once more to Paul as he writes: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (10:13). In the fourth chapter of Romans, Paul develops the "one faith," which is God's method of salvation—Jesus. In speaking of Abraham's faith, Paul informs his readers that what was said to Abraham was also said for the benefit of everyone who is willing to put his or her trust in Jesus. This concept is fully worked out by Paul:

> The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, [24] but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. [25] He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification (4:23-25).

The "one faith" that unites is: "He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification." The "one faith" is an accomplishment of God. Many do not allow the Gospel to be what it is by substituting their own works and their own accomplishments in the hope of eternal life. When we assert justification by works and not by and through the finished work of Christ upon Calvary, then we proclaim another Gospel. As we peruse the Book of Galatians (AD 48/49), we also discover that this book too is devoted exclusively to the same theme. Some Judaizers had sought to undermine the "one faith" by denying that justification is by faith in the completed work of Christ upon the Cross.

Thus, he goes right to the core of the problem: "You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace" (Galatians 5:4). The act that reconciles us to God is not our own act, but rather it is the act of God that brings us together to Himself. Paul, in the Book of Galatians, confronts the issue of justification face-to-face with the adversaries. The question about justification is: is it by works or through faith? He sets forth the dilemma in the beginning of this epistle:

> I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—[7] which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. [8] But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! [9] As we have already said, so now I say again: **If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted**, let him be eternally condemned! (Galatians 1:6-9)

If we have not read the Book of Galatians recently, we should reread this book to see what the "one faith" is all about. In Chapter 2, Paul discusses his confrontation with Peter and accuses him and the others of "not acting in line with the **truth of the gospel**" (2:14). After analyzing the problems, he writes down: "I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!" (2:21). Over again, Paul expands his arguments about the makeup of the Gospel. In this enlargement of the Good News, he adds:

> Consider Abraham: "He believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." [7] Understand, then, that those who believe are children of Abraham. [8] **The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham**: "All nations will be blessed through you." [9] So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. (3:6-9)

Paul says that almost two thousand years earlier that the Gospel was preached to Abraham. The word *Gospel* is frequently identified with one's brand of theological beliefs, not as Good News about God's way of justification by grace through faith in Jesus. If we accept the traditional interpretation of Galatians 1:6-9, we wonder if God preached to Abraham the sinfulness of Instrumental music, the sinfulness of individual cups, the sinfulness of Sunday school, the sinfulness of Bible colleges, and so on. Whatever the Gospel is, this Gospel was proclaimed to Abraham. As we continue to read the third chapter of Galatians, we at once see that Paul identifies this Gospel as Jesus:

Brothers, let me take an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or add to a human covenant that has been duly established, so it is in this case. [16]The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say "and to seeds," meaning many people, but "and to your seed," meaning one person, who is Christ. (3:15-16)

The "Gospel" and the "one faith" are equivalent terms that describe the same person. This Gospel of justification is equivalent to the "word of faith" that Paul makes known to the Romans (Romans 10:8), which is also equivalent to the "one faith" in Ephesians 4:5. The "word of faith" refers to what he writes in Romans 10:6-11:

But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) [7]"or 'Who will descend into the deep?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). [8] But what does it say? "**The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming:** [9]That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. [10]For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. [11]As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame."

Paul contrasts the "word of faith" with the works of the Law. The "word of faith" is Jesus. With the heart we believe in Jesus. We who believe in Jesus are justified. This Jesus is the "one faith" that can bring together the people of God. This "word of faith" is not, as stated above, a compendium of theology put forth by various offshoots within the fragmented body of Christ. All over again, one might say that this "one faith" is: "God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement" (10:5). This sacrifice of Christ is the very heart of the Gospel. In the Corinthian Epistle, Paul captures the real meaning of the "one faith," when he pens:

God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. [20]We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. [21]God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:19-21)

This verse (19) gives the central part of the Gospel—reconciliation with God through Jesus. The KJV renders verse 19: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not **imputing** their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation." The word *impute* means to put down to someone's account. God, says Paul, has taken our sins and has imputed them to Christ. God has punished our sins in Him: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (5:21). Christ bore the punishment that we deserve. Peter reports the sacrifice of Christ this way: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed" (1 Peter 2:24).

God did not stop with imputing our sins to Jesus, but He also imputed (credited) His righteousness to us who put our trust in Jesus for salvation. We can say with great joy: "our **unrighteousness** was put on Him, but, on the other hand, His righteousness was put on us." Paul elaborates on this kind of righteousness in his discussion of Abraham. He says, "But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; [25]Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" (Romans 4:24-24, KJV). Paul also cites the words of David (1010-970 BC, reigned), who wrote approximately 1000 years after Abraham, concerning imputation:

What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? [2]For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath *whereof* to glory; but not before God. [3]For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it **was counted unto him for righteousness**. [4]Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. [5]But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. **[6]Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,** [7]*Saying*, Blessed *are* they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. [8]Blessed *is* the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin. (4:1-8, KJV).

God's method of salvation under the Old Testament was by imputation. In Ephesians, Paul is concerned about the essential principle of unity based upon God's actions in Christ Jesus. Salvation is God's action; it is all of grace; it is all God's doing from first to last. There is only one way of salvation—the way of faith. We can break this unity of faith by bringing in our own works. We can break this unity of faith by insisting that all believers submit to our own unique party of believers. When we break this unity, we deny the centrality of the "one Lord," namely, Jesus. The "one faith" is not a creedal statement that represents some identifying mark of accepted beliefs that distinguishes one Church of Christ from another Church of Christ. The "one faith" is either Jesus or else Jesus is the object of personal belief. As I bring this chapter to a close, perhaps Paul's words to Timothy in his first and second epistles would be appropriate to conclude this in-depth study:

> Deacons, likewise, are to be men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. [9] They must keep hold of the **deep truths of the faith** with a clear conscience. (1 Timothy 3:8-9)

> Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, [15] if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. [16] Beyond all question, **the mystery of godliness is great**: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory (3:14-16).

> **Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel**, [9] for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But God's word is not chained. [10] Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, **that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory**. (2 Timothy 2:8-10)

The next chapter (19) analyzes another text that should be reexamined through new eyes. One of the most popular sayings among Christians today is, "The truth will set you free." When this text is isolated from its context, then, the text can mean anything that an individual believes the Bible teaches. This skewed interpretation of John 8:32 has resulted from piece-meal interpretation. Chapter 19 explores the immediate context in order to arrive at Jesus' intended meaning. This chapter reveals that the "truth" that will set us free is none other than Jesus Himself.

19

The Truth Will Set You Free

> This assault by God upon the world is Jesus Christ. This is the meaning of revelation and atonement. He is the Divine King who thus establishes His sovereignty, and in so doing sets humanity free from the powers which are hostile to God and therefore also hostile to life.[496]

One of the best-known Scriptures within the Christian community is a statement by Jesus: "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). This Scripture is frequently employed by many sincere Christians in order to justify their separation from other Christians over what they conceive to be the "truth," that is to say, their particular brand name of prevailing attitude. The question that confronts every Christian is this: What is "the truth" that Jesus alludes to? Is this "truth" dogmatic truth? Is it right orthodoxy? Is this "truth" abstract truth? Is this "truth" simply an understanding of intellectual knowledge of facts recorded in the Bible? As we approach this well-known passage, we face the influence of previous misunderstanding in our interpretation. The abuse of this Scripture, in many instances, has fractured the Body of Christ into warring factions, each claiming to be the only ones who have a handle on the "truth" that Jesus speaks about in John 8:32. This chapter is not designed to castigate God's people for their lack of understanding, but rather the purpose of this study is to help break down the barriers that separate the ones for whom Christ died.[497]

E. D. Hirsch (b. 1928, presently, he is 92), U. S. educator and academic literary critic, enunciates a basic principle of interpretation that we must apply in the interpretation of any text: "Meaning is that which is represented by a text."[498] Hirsch is simply saying that the meaning of any wording is the author's meaning, not the interpreter's. Today, we should reject the traditional interpretation of John 8:32 because it is wrong. This "truth" is not one's party slant. It is Jesus! Whenever an interpreter discards the meaning of the author, the interpreter takes over the place of the author—this leads to confusion and division among God's people. When we begin with a faulty foundation (conception or impression) about what the text is saying, we are able to find all our viewpoints. After we throw out the context, we are without a guidepost to steer us in an accurate awareness of the author's intent.

As soon as we come within reach of John 8:32, we must not move toward this text with strong subjective biases. In our advance toward this Scripture, we must not isolate this text from its context. It is not uncommon for Christians to view the Bible as a series of unrelated verses. It is not exceptional for God's

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[496]Emil Brunner, *The Mediator: A Study of the Central Doctrine of the Christian Faith* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1934, 1952), 553.

[497]This essay is rather lengthy, but this drawn-out discussion is necessary in order to lead individuals into the true meaning of the text. When we try to eliminate traditions, we must go to great lengths in order to unfold the author's intent. For this reason, I have taken a great deal of space to analyze the first seven chapters of the Gospel of John in order to nail down the meaning we should attach to Jesus' words about "the truth shall set you free."

[498]E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University press, 1967), 8.

children to habitually proof-text Scriptures in order to give validity to their doctrinal beliefs. Cedric B. Johnson is correct when he writes: "'A proof-texting' approach is a poor way to discover the meaning of Scriptures."[499] This kind of theology is hollow and empty. People want to hear again about the saving revelation of God as revealed in His Holy Word—Jesus Christ, the mediator of the divine covenant of grace. In many fellowships, we witness the "paper pope" (religious journals—not all, but some). In this system of orthodoxy, we observe that, for many, faith is commonly identified with the traditions of the church—both faith and traditions become identical.

Leroy Garrett (1918-2015), as early as 1976, called attention to the abuse of this passage. He briefly comments on this penetrating passage, along with many others, in order to bring individuals back to the true intent of Jesus' words. Listen to Garrett's insightful words as he seeks to unfold the original intent:

> Also in my file is a tearsheet from one of our papers on *what is truth?* It reminds one of how terribly we have abused this term, applying it, for the most part to our particular party slant. You are loyal to "the truth" if you are acappella or amillennial or noncooperative—or faithful to what the Christian Church or Church of Christ teaches. There are of course many truths in Scripture, and we must be faithful to all of them that we understand. Some of these are obviously more important than others. But "the truth" is something else, and I can't believe that when Jesus said "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" that he was referring to all the truths of revelation. He was referring to his own entrance into history and into the lives of his disciples. He and only he is the truth. When one knows that truth, when he knows Jesus, he is free, not until. It doesn't matter how full his head may be of the many truths of Scripture or how faithfully he interprets all the doctrine. If his heart is empty of the truth, which is the Person of Jesus dwelling in our hearts through faith, then all else is vain.[500]

Garrett strips away all extraneous matter when he writes: "He was referring to his own entrance into history and into the lives of his disciples. He and only he is the truth." Did Garrett just decide the meaning of "the truth" subjectively or did he examine the context objectively? A word of caution is in order when anyone approaches God's Word. As stated above, we should never proof-text as our method of interpretation. It is not sufficient to just quote a passage; we must consider its historical context. Since the Word comes to us in the form of a past context, we should examine the Scriptures before and after the text under examination in order to draw from the Scriptures what God says to His people. John 8:32 is frequently limited by the predetermined interpretive grid (brand of orthodoxy/party slant). Just a perusal of many Church of Christ journals reveals that the various factions within the Churches of Christ lay claim to this Scripture as their own. As a result of this mindset, many saints confuse their view of Scripture with their own interpretation—an interpretation that is identified as "the truth." From this kind of reasoning, if we disagree, we are then described as *unsound*.

Before I analyze the context for John 8:32, perhaps it would be helpful to call attention to the fact that I grew up in a fellowship in which this passage was cited to justify separation from every believer that dared to disagree with the status quo of my particular fellowship.[501] As a young man, I was associated with the one-cup and non-Sunday school fellowship. I cited this passage to prove that if one wanted freedom then one had to give up individual cups, Sunday school, instrumental music, wine in the Lord's Supper, breaking of the bread,[502] and

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[499]Cedric B. Johnson, *The Psychology of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 27.

[500]Leroy Garrett, "Some of the Left over Passages," *Restoration Review* 18, no. 10 (December 1976): 283.

[501]Even though I am calling attention to the abuse of this Scripture in my earlier traditions, I still must say that the ones who taught me were sincere and godly men. Many of these preachers are now with the Lord; they have crossed the great gulf between God and humanity. I have been extremely fortunate to have been exposed to the science of interpretation. As a result of having been exposed to the science of interpretation, I have been able to avoid the many pitfalls of the forefathers in the Stone/Campbell Movement. It goes, almost without saying, that perfect understanding of God's Holy Word is not essential to salvation. But what God is concerned about is whether one loves Him. Listen to Paul as he seeks to draw attention to what it is all about:

> Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. [2] The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. [3] But the man who loves God is known by God. (1 Corinthians 8:1-3)

[502]This particular group "pinches" the bread rather than "breaks" the bread. If one broke the bread, one broke the bones of Jesus and violated the Scripture that states that not a bone of Him shall be broken.

so on. In the prevailing attitude of this fellowship, Christians did not recognize the distinction between the Word of God and their traditions (doctrine), which is also true of many other Churches of Christ outside this small group of believers. One of the basic errors of this sincere fellowship consisted in an overvaluation of doctrine of the church rather than proclamation of Jesus and Him crucified. This fellowship confused the proclamation of the Good News with their brand of accepted beliefs.

As we examine the preaching of the Apostles, we discover that the missionary proclamation of the Apostles has only a distant relationship to what takes place in the pulpit of many churches today. What takes place in countless churches today has very little to do with what the Bible calls "proclaiming the Word." Just recently, I read a chapter in a book on missionary activities—yet to be published—in which the author stressed the sinfulness of handclapping in the assembly, contemporary singing in the congregation, instrumental music in congregational singing,[503] preachers preaching from the floor in order to be closer to the congregation, women participating in the assembly, and so on.[504] Ultimately, this dear brother concludes that anyone who is not in his camp on these issues is in the camp of the post-modernist. It is not uncommon for Christians of this mindset to cite John 8:32 to give credence to their position of the nature of "truth." Those who wish to discard the false identification of doctrine with the Word of God—the Gospel of God—are castigated with the anathema of "post-modernist" or "digressive" or "unsound" in THE FAITH.

Countless churches no longer understand themselves as missionary churches. The churches, as a whole, have put so much emphasis upon right doctrine that they have ceased to emphasize discipleship. Within many fellowships, especially within some Churches of Christ, so much emphasis is placed upon the "true church" or the "Lord's church"[505] that the true purpose of the Christian community has been lost—proclamation of God's Way of salvation in and through Jesus Christ—who is "the Truth" that sets one free (John 8:32). Just a casual reading of the Sermons in the Book of Acts reveals the distinction between the preaching of the Apostles and the preaching of the modern day church, especially within some of the twenty-five or more divisions within the Churches of Christ. It is in this vein that Emil Brunner (1889-1966, Swiss theologian, says,

> The truth of which the Bible speaks is always a happening, and indeed the happening of the meeting between God and man, an act of God which must be received by an act of man. The truth acting—this is the characteristic unphilosophical, non-Greek way in which the Bible speaks of truth. In the measure that this understanding of truth again becomes alive in it, the Church will itself be renewed again into the true Church. For this renascence we are hoping.[506]

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE FIRST SEVEN CHAPTERS IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

If we are to interpret John 8:32 correctly, we must treat this text within its full unit of meaning. The safest way for us to be sure that the Scriptures support our own position is to ignore the context. In order for us

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[503]For an examination of the subject of instrumental music in the Christian assembly, see Dallas Burdette, "God Is A Lover of Music" in *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2008), 236-248.

[504]The items listed above are issues surrounding the so-called worship service associated with five rituals to be performed on Sunday morning in a prescribed way. The Bible does not call the assembly a worship service; this concept has come out of Roman Catholicism. For essays dealing with the current problems within the Churches of Christ over "worship," See Dallas Burdette, "The Coming of God's Kingdom: A Call to Worship," "True Worship," "Congregational Worship and Division," "Sunday Morning Worship—Five Acts," Worship: An Analysis of the Various Greek Words," and "Biblical Worship" [ONLINE]. Available from www.freedominchrist.net [accessed September 29, 2008] located under caption the SERMONS AND ESSAYS and then under WORSHIP.

[505]The unique expression ("the Lord's Church") is employed by many within the Churches of Christ to distinguish themselves from the so-called denominational world. In other words, no one is a member of the Lord's Church who is not a part of the Churches of Christ. It goes almost without saying that the denominational Church of Christ did not exist when Luther (1483-1546) nailed his ninety-five theses to the door of Schlosskirche in 1517, nor did the Church of Christ exist when Pope Urban II (AD 1042-1099) led the first Christian crusade (AD 1095-1099) in 1095. The church of Christ was in existence, but not the Church of Christ Church that came out of the Stone/Campbell Movement.

[506]Emil Brunner, *The Divine-Human Encounter* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1943), 210-202.

to understand the meaning of Jesus' words in John 8:32, we must unpack the background leading up to the text in question. John begins his Gospel with the identity of this One who is called Jesus:

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. [2]He was with God in the beginning. [3] Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. [4] In him was life, and that life was the light of men. [5]The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood[a] it. (John 1:1-5)

In these four verses, John goes right to the heart of the One who will set one free. This One is none other than the One whom John writes: "The **Word became flesh** and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only,[d] who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (1:14). This verse reveals that Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. In other words, Jesus is the centerpiece of history: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. [7] If you really knew me, you would know[a] my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him" (John 14:6). Jesus is the single way to God. It is only in Jesus Christ that we find freedom from God's wrath. For us to deny this message about Jesus, while, at the same time, pursuing spirituality, we simply conjure up an imaginary religion—one that is fatal. Only the Son of God can make us free.

The Prologue to John reveals that the message about Christ is not just an introduction to a religion, but rather it is an **introduction to the truth** about the reality of God and His love for humanity. Following the Prologue, John zeros in on the ministry of John the Baptist (1:19-28). In this pericope (unit of Scripture), John the Baptist denies that he himself is "the Christ" (1:20). After this encounter, John sees Jesus coming and exclaims: "Look, the **Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world**" (1:29)! The day following this confession of John, John again calls attention to Jesus as the Lamb of God (1:36). Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, heard John speak and immediately found Peter and told him that he had found "the Messiah (that is, the Christ)" (1:40-42). The next day, Philip also found Nathanael and told him about the Messiah (1:43-51). After this meeting with Jesus, Nathanael confessed: "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel" (1:49).

In Chapter 2 of the Gospel of John, John writes about Jesus changing water into wine (2:1-11) and about His clearing the Temple of those making merchandise of God's holy place (2:12-25). In this pericope (Jesus Clears the Temple), Jesus encounters rejection by the Jews. In spite of this negative response by the Jews, Jesus still performed many miracles while in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast (2:23). Many came to the conclusion that Jesus is the answer to man's slavery to sin—"many people saw the miraculous signs he was doing and believed in his name" (2:23). Chapter 3 opens with Nicodemus coming to Jesus (3:1-2). During his conversation with Jesus, Jesus tells Nicodemus that

> God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son,[f] that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. [17] For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. [18]Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.[g] [19] This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. [20] Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. [21] But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.[h] (3:16-21).

Surely, John 3:16-21 is a commentary on John 8:31-32 and 8:36-37:

If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. [32]Then you will	So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. [37]I know you are

a Or *darkness, and the darkness has not overcome*
d Or the Only Begotten
a Some early manuscripts If you really have known me, you will know
f Or *his only begotten Son*
g Or *God's only begotten Son*
h Some interpreters end the quotation after verse 15.

know the truth, and the truth will set you free. (8:31-32)

Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word. (8:36-37)

If we refuse this teaching—Jesus came from God to save the world—we will perish. Freedom from condemnation can only be found in our acceptance of Jesus as the Son of God, the Savior of the world. Again, after this conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, John gives John the Baptist' testimony about Jesus (3:22-36). In this testimony John goes right to the heart of Jesus' teaching:

> The **one who comes from above** is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. [32] **He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony**. [33] The man who has accepted it has certified that God is truthful. [34] For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God[c] gives the Spirit without limit. [35] The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. [36] **Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him**.[d] (3:31-36)

If we reject this teaching that Jesus is "The one who comes from above," then we will perish "for God's wrath remains on him." It is only the Son of God who can set us free from the wrath of God. In the very next chapter, we observe that the Samaritan woman believed this testimony (4:1-26). Not only did she believe this teaching—"I who speak to you am he" (1:28)—but many of the Samaritans also believed that Jesus was the Messiah (4:39-42). In Chapter 5, Jesus heals a man who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years (5:1-15). As a result of this healing on the Sabbath, the Jews sought to persecute Jesus. The Jews reasoned that since He forgave sins, this statement made Jesus equal with God (5:18). Again, Jesus explains His teachings about His relationship to the Father:

> I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. [20] For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these. [21] For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. [22] Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, [23] that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him. (5:19-23)

If we refuse to accept and abide in this teaching, God's wrath abides upon us. Once more, Jesus strips away all the underbrush and goes right to the heart of eternal salvation: "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life" (5:24). As we turn to chapter six, John reveals that Jesus fed five thousand with just "five small barley loaves and two small fish" (6:1-8). Those who witnessed this miracle exclaimed: "Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world" (6:14). Following Jesus' walking on water (6:16-24), the crowd found Him on the other side of the lake (6:25). Jesus reflects upon the earlier miracle of feeding the five thousand and refers to Himself as "the bread of life" (6:35). In the flow of the conversation with Jesus, they inquired: "What must we do to do the works God requires" (6:28). Jesus responds with piercing words about His identity: "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent" (6:29).

If we wish to know what the teaching is that Jesus speaks of in 8:31, we should reflect once more on Jesus' words to the crowd that He had previously fed. Listen to the words of Jesus as He seeks to call attention to Himself in the scheme of redemption:

> I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. [36] But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. [37] All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. [38] For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. [39] And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise

c Greek *he*

d Some interpreters end the quotation after verse 30.

them up at the last day. [40] For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. (6:35-40)

If one "looks to the Son and believes in him," that one "shall have eternal life." It is only in the Son of God that we find freedom from God's wrath. In Chapter 6, we also read about the desertion of many of His disciples, individuals who rejected His teachings about Himself (6:53-66). In Chapter 7, John records that Jesus went to the Feast of the Tabernacles (7:1-13). While at this Feast, Jesus teaches (7:14-24). About halfway through the Feast, Jesus goes into the temple courts and begins to teach (7:14). As result of His teachings, "The Jews were amazed and asked, 'How did this man get such learning without having studied'" (7:15). In reaction to their question, Jesus responded by saying:

My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. [17] If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. [18] He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself, but he who works for the honor of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him. [19] Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me? (7:16-19)

Many Jews rejected this teaching about Jesus' Deity. They rejected Him as the One that the Prophets foretold would come to take away the sins of the world. John focuses once more on the identity of Jesus by reporting the reaction of the people to Jesus:

At that point some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill? [26] Here he is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to him. Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Christ[a]? [27] But we know where this man is from; when the Christ comes, no one will know where he is from." (7:25-27)

Is Jesus the Christ? Some said "yes," but others said "no." Following this conversation in 7:25-27, John, once more, calls attention to Jesus' teaching. Pay attention to the words of Jesus as He again identifies Himself: "Yes, you know me, and you know where I am from. I am not here on my own, but he who sent me is true. You do not know him, [29] but I know him because I am from him and he sent me" (7:28-29). After this encounter, each went to his own home, but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives (8:1). When dawn came, Jesus, once more, went to the temple courts where the people gathered around him and He taught them (8:2). In this teaching, Jesus says, "I am the light of the world, Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (8:12).

The Pharisees challenged this teaching (8:13), but Jesus did not for one moment shrink back from this teaching. He plowed ahead, as it were, with the truth of His teachings:

Even if I testify on my own behalf, **my testimony** is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going. [15] You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one. [16] But if I do judge, my decisions are right, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me. [17]In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two men is valid. [18] I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me. (8:14-18)

The Pharisees rejected this teaching, but Jesus continued to drive home the point that without belief in Him, one could not be free. Jesus says, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. [24] I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be,[a] you will indeed die in your sins" (8:23-24). In spite of this rejection by the religious leaders, nevertheless, there were Jews who believed His teachings about His having come from the Father to give eternal life to those who believe in Him (8:31). Listen to Jesus as He says, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. [32]

a Or *Messiah*; also in verses 27, 31, 41 and 42
a Or *I am he*; also in verse 28

Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (8:31-32). Then Jesus drops the bombshell on His listeners:

> I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. [35] Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. [36] So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. [37] I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word. [38] I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you do what you have heard from your father.[b] (8:34-38)

THE "I AM" STATEMENTS

With the above examination of the first seven chapters in John leading up to 8:32, this focus should assist us in understanding the "I AM" statement as a reference point in approaching John 8:32. The preceding discussion about Jesus' statements concerning Himself is necessary in order to fully grasp the significance of this now famous verse (8:32). The "I am" statements in the Gospel of John should enhance our understanding of what Jesus really meant by "the truth will make you free." Only in the Gospel of John do we discover the startling "I am" statements. John records seven great "I am" (**ἐγὼ εἰμί**, *egō eimi*) announcements of Jesus (6:35; 9:5; 10:7; 10:11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1).

Each of the "I am" sayings is followed with a predicate nominative—"the light of the world," and so on. These "I am" declarations indicate that one is dealing with someone who is deity. In addition to these seven assertions, we also read of three statements in the eighth chapter of the Gospel of John (8:24, 28, 58) that sets forth in clear terms that Jesus is the One that the prophets foretold would come into the world to save sinners—"I am He." The pronoun "He" is added as a predicate nominative, even thought the I AM sayings in vv. 24, 28, and 58 are absolute—no predicate. These statements by Jesus unfold something of the greatness of this One that is called "the Christ" (**ὁ Χριστός**, *ho Christos*). He identifies Himself as the Messiah (**Μεσσίας**, *Messias*), the savior of the world (1:29-30). Having said this, Jesus, in this very statement (**ἐγὼ εἰμί**, *egō eimi*), discloses the truth of His Person—deity.

John does not argue the point of Christ's Deity as he begins his Gospel. He simply states that Christ "was with (**πρός**, *pros,* literally, facing God) God in the beginning" and that Christ "was God" [**θεός ἦν ὁ λόγος**, *theos ēn ho logos*] (John 1:1-2). After stressing the Deity of Christ in the Prologue (1:1-18), he gives evidence to substantiate his bold assertions about who Christ is as well as His preexistence (1:14-18). John the Baptist said, "He was before (**ἔμπροσθεν**, *emprosthen*) me" (1:15). John had a beginning in time, but there has never been a time in which Jesus never existed. In fact, He created time. John proves Jesus' Deity by calling attention to the miraculous in Jesus' ministry, and, at the same time, John gives the personal testimony of Jesus to substantiate His preexistence in order to prove that Jesus existed prior to the creation of this universe. Thus, from this testimony, John declares: "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (1:3).

This language of John is similar to the language of Paul to the Christians at Colossae. In this short epistle, Paul, too, speaks of the creation as a work of Christ: "For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; **all things were created by him** and for him. [17] **He is before all things** (**πρὸ πάντων**, *pro pantōn*), and in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:16-17). John also records a prayer of Jesus—a prayer that occurred shortly before His trial—which is quite revealing, concerning His preexistence. In this prayer, Jesus prays: "Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you **before the world began**" (John 17:5).

The Gospel of John is loaded with information concerning the preexistence of Jesus. On one occasion, Jesus encountered some Jews who were antagonistic toward His remarks about God and Himself. In the ensuing conversation, He replied:

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b Or *presence. Therefore do what you have heard from the Father.*

If I glorify myself, my glory means nothing. My Father, whom you claim as your God, is the one who glorifies me. [55] Though you do not know him, I know him. If I said I did not, I would be a liar like you, but I do know him and keep his word. [56] Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad. (8:54-56)

This affirmation by Jesus is amazing. Why? Well, He said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." Abraham was born in 2166 BC and died in 1991 BC; yet, Jesus speaks of Abraham as having seen the day of Christ and was glad. How could this be? Abraham lived 2000 years before the birth of Jesus. In fact, the Jews questioned Him: "You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" (8:57). Jesus' answer to their statement is quite revealing concerning His true identity. In His response to the Jews, He testifies that He existed before Abraham (8:58) and that He is the One whom Abraham saw (**ἐγὼ εἰμί**, *egō eimi*, I am he). The "I AM" statement, as observed above, is an expression of deity. The Greek text is: "Before (**πρίν**, *prin*) Abraham became (**γενέσθαι**, *genesthai*, to become) I am (**ἐγὼ εἰμί**, *egō eimi*)." The aorist verb (*genesthai*) marks a historical point in time. On the other hand, Jesus uses the present tense to indicate that before Abraham's existence He Himself existed.

With this expression (*egō eimi*), an expression that is applied to God the Father in the Old Testament, Jesus is not saying that He is identical with the Father, but rather He is claiming that this unique expression may also be used of Him. In the eighth chapter of John (vv. 24, 28), He does assert His Messiahship with this same expression. Not only did He assert his preexistence, but He also identified Himself as the One foretold by the prophets that would take away the sins of the world. Listen, once more, to Jesus as he boldly asserts: "before Abraham was born, I am! (**ἐγὼ εἰμί**, *egō eimi*)" (8:58). Abraham's time was time-bound. On the other hand, Jesus is not time-bound. With the "I AM" expression, Jesus points to His existence with God beyond the bounds of time.[507] George Beasley-Murray (1916-1980), professor of New Testament from 1973-1980, expresses the significance of the **ἐγὼ εἰμί**, (*egō eimi)* saying this way: '"Before Abraham came into existence I am' expresses 'the contrast between the existence initiated by birth and an absolute existence.'"[508]

The three occurrences of the "I AM" sayings (absolute) in chapter eight is found in the absolute, no predicate attached.[509] This confession (8:58) is the third of the "I am" (**ἐγὼ εἰμί**, *egō eimi*) statements in the eighth chapter of John. Did the Jews understand Jesus' declaration that He was the One to come as predicted by the prophets? Did they comprehend this unique expression to refer to deity? Yes, they did! They understood His words, but they did not believe His words. John records their swift reaction to these words: "At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds" (8:59). The Jews refused to hold/accept the teaching of Jesus about His identity (8:31).

JESUS IS THE TRUTH

As we examine the Christian faith, we can say that the Christian faith is faith in Jesus as "the truth." For us to say that Jesus is the content of truth is a radical departure from the ordinary concept of truth. In the Prologue to the Gospel of John, John writes: "grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). With Jesus, truth came into being. Truth is something that happens; in other words, it is something God does. It is in Jesus that grace and truth reaches its pinnacle—grace and truth come to realization. In our reflection upon the Incarnation, we understand that this supernatural birth is not the pivotal point of the biblical Revelation, but rather the work of the redeemer that results in salvation for sinful humanity.

The Gospel of John guides us in understanding the "mystery of God," which is Jesus Christ (See also Colossians 1:27—2:2). The Person of the Mediator must be understood as an act of God—an act designed to set men and women free from condemnation (See also Romans 5:1-2; 8:1). In the Gospel, we observe that God reveals Himself in Jesus—"the Truth." God also reconciles the world unto Himself in Jesus—"the Truth." It is

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[507]See Gail R. O'Day, *The Gospel of John* in Leander E. Keck, ed., *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 646. I am indebted to her insights for her discussion of the predicate added by translators to the absolute **ἐγὼ εἰμί**.

[508]George R. Beasley-Murray, *John* in *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol., 36 (Waco: Texas: Work Books, 1987), 139.

[509]In 8:18, there is an **ἐγὼ εἰμί** statement, but this **ἐγὼ εἰμί** is not absolute; it has a predicate attached to it—"who testifies for myself."

in Him that God redeems humanity (See also 2 Corinthians 5:17-19). Jesus is God's act of Atonement for sinful humanity. It is in and through His Son that God gives freedom. It is in and through His Son that God gives Himself. Again, we can say that the sufferings of Christ—His passion—is the act of God in which He gives Himself and establishes fellowship with both men and women. Is it any wonder that Jesus went to the very heart of redemption when He startled His disciples with the following words:

> You are from below; **I am from above**. You are of this world; I am not of this world. [24] **I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be**,[a] you will indeed die in your sins. (John 8:23-24)

Jesus identifies Himself as the One who came forth from the Father. Some rejected this truth and therefore condemned themselves (8:42). In contrast, there were some who put their faith in Him. Thus, Jesus said to the Jews who believed that He came from the Father and that He was the Christ: "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. [32] Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (8:31-32). What truth (teaching) would they know? The Jews would know that Jesus is the One whom Abraham saw. They would know the truth that Jesus is the Son of Man. They would know the truth that He is God. They would know the truth (teaching) that Jesus is the One whom God sent into the world. They would know that He is from above. That is to say, they would know that Jesus is the One He claimed to be. The word *truth* in verse 32 is the same as the word *Son* in verse 36. The following chart in parallel columns illustrates graphically this truth:

John 8:31-32	John 8:36-37
To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. [32] Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."	So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. [37] I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word.

Gail R. O'Day writes: "The truth is the presence of God in Jesus."[510] Again, she writes: "It shows a complete misunderstanding of the egw eimi saying. They think Jesus has merely omitted the predicate in an identification saying and grasp none of the theological overtones."[511] See the following chart for a comparison of the three ἐγὼ εἰμί, egw eimi, sayings in John 8. We will observe, in all three verses, that we only find the egw eimi sayings in the absolute, even though the NIV adds a predicate—"the one I claim to be" in two (vv. 24 and 28) of the three citations:

John 8:24	John 8:28	John 8:58
I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be (ἐγὼ εἰμί), you will indeed die in your sins.	When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be (ἐγὼ εἰμί) and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me.	"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" (ἐγὼ εἰμί)

a Or *I am he*; also in verse 28

[510]Gail R. O'Day, *The Gospel of John*., 637.

[511]Ibid., 634.

Again, in John (Chapter 8) there are four occurrences of the "I AM" (*egō eimi*) sayings; all except one are expressed in the absolute, no predicate given. This absolute saying is difficult to reproduce in English.[512] There are possibly three meanings that one could assign to this unique expression: (**1**) I am what I say I am—the light of the world, (**2**) I am He—the promised Messiah, and (**3**) I am—absolutely, the divine name. Even though all three ideas are present, nevertheless none are actually indicated. To those who refused to acknowledge this truth found in the *egō eimi* saying, Jesus said: "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. [24] I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that **I am** the one I claim to be (**ἐγὼ εἰμί**, *egō eimi*), you will indeed die in your sins" (8:23-24).

To return again to the "I AM" statement in 8:28, Jesus had just called to their attention a point in the future when many would acknowledge His claim to be from above and the One whom Abraham saw. John records the following words for his readers and for us:

> When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be (ἐγὼ εἰμί, egw eimi) and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. [29] The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him. (8:28-29).

The occurrence of the "I AM" in 8:28 is, as stated above, absolute, no predicate supplied. The NIV does supply a predicate by translating this as: "I am **the one I claim to be**." The NRSV supplies a pronoun as a predicate nominative ("I am **he**"). Even though these translations may be accurate according to the context, still one must remember that by adding the predicate, one alters the absolute ἐγὼ εἰμί, egw eimi. Jesus identifies Himself with the divine name.[513] We can hardly read this prediction (8:28) of Jesus without reflection upon the Roman Centurion who stood at the foot of the Cross. Mark gives the following reaction of this Centurion: "And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, 'Surely this man was the Son of God!'" (Mark 15:39).

Generally, the "I am" (**ἐγὼ εἰμί**, *egō eimi*) saying in John 8:58 is associated with Exodus 3:14, and there is validity to this assumption. God said to Moses: "I AM WHO I AM (**Ἐγὼ εἰμί ὁ ὤν**, *Egō eimi ho ō*). This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" (3:14). The *egō eimi* is an Old Testament formula. The phrase is equivalent to "I am the Lord."[514] The **ἐγὼ εἰμί** in the Septuagint (LXX) renders the Hebrew אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה[515] (ʾĕ·hᵉyĕ(h)ʼ ʾăšĕrʼ ʾĕ·hᵉyĕ(h)ʼ), which is the way God speaks (see Deuteronomy 32:39; Isaiah 41:4; 43:10; 46:4). The Hebrew may carry a reference to the divine name יהוה (*yhwh*).[516]

This absolute occurs in several passages in the Gospel of John—4:26; 6:20; 8: 24, 28, 58; 13:9; 18:5, 6, 8. Perhaps, there is some justification for adding the predicate since the controversy was over whether or not Jesus is the Christ (7:25-44). But having said this, we must never forget that the egw eimi is absolute in the above references, even though sometimes, in other citations, one does observe the predicate, for example, John 6:35—"I am the bread of life." This essay does not deal with 8:18, since this expression does not occur in the sections of controversy over who Jesus is.

Earlier, Jesus, in His conversation with the Samaritan woman, used this same phrase—"I am he" (**ἐγὼ εἰμί**, *egō eimi*). In the course of this encounter, the woman responded to a statement of Jesus by saying: "I know that Messiah (called Christ) is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us" (4:25). In response to this statement about the Messiah, Jesus responded by saying: "I who speak to you am he (**ἐγὼ εἰμί**, *egō eimi*)" (4:26). Jesus states emphatically that He is the One that she and others were looking to come. Pay attention to 4:26 once more: "Jesus says to her: 'I am (**ἐγὼ εἰμί**, *egō eimi*, "I am he") the one speaking to you'" (my

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[512]See Leon Morris (1914-2006), *The Gospel According to John*, Revised, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 397.

[513]O' Day, *The Gospel of John*, 634.

[514]See Beasley-Murray, *John*, 130.

[515] *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia: With Westminster Hebrew Morphology.*, electronic ed. (Stuttgart; Glenside PA: German Bible Society; Westminster Seminary, 1996), Ex 3:14.

[516]See Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, 420.

translation—RDB). The "I am" statement in John 4:26 is equivalent to the three identical phrases found in John chapter eight (vv. 23, 28, 58).

In the seventh chapter of John, Jesus emphasizes His origin and His mission. At the Feast of Booths (Tabernacles), Jesus began to teach. As a result of this teaching, "The Jews were amazed and asked, 'How did this man get such learning without having studied?'" (7:15). Whereupon Jesus responds by saying: "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me" (7:16). Following His discourse, some asked the question concerning His identity. John records the following response from the people as to whether or not He really is the Christ:

> At that point some of the people of Jerusalem began to ask, "Isn't this the man they are trying to kill? [26] Here he is, speaking publicly, and they are not saying a word to him. Have the authorities really concluded that he is the Christ? [27] But we know where this man is from; when the Christ comes, no one will know where he is from." (7:25-26)

On the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles (Booths), Jesus stood and said in a loud voice: "If anyone is thirsty, let him **come to me** and drink. [38] Whoever **believes in me**, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him" (7:37-38). Again, almost immediately, the people said, '"Surely this man is the Prophet.' Others said, 'He is the Christ.'" In Chapter 8 of John's Gospel, Jesus gives testimony as to His preexistence and to His being the Christ whom God sent. Three times in this chapter, Jesus uses the expression: ἐγὼ εἰμί, egw eimi (8:24, 28, 58) in the absolute. The salvation of the Jews depended upon their acceptance of Jesus as the Christ, the savior of the world. Pay attention to Jesus as He issues His warning against the Jews: "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. [24] I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am (**ἐγὼ εἰμί**, *egō eimi*) **the one I claim to be**, you will indeed die in your sins" (8:23-24). The Jews demanded to know "Who are you?" (8:25). Thus, the translators provided the predicate for the "I am" in order to complete the sense of Jesus' response.

The NIV added the words, "*the one I claim to be*." This translation captures the essence of verse 24. Unless they accepted the fact that Jesus is the One He claimed to be, they would die in their sins. Repetition is unavoidable in this study. It is necessary to call to mind certain Scriptures over and over again in order to draw attention to the significance of John 8:58. Our salvation hinges upon our acceptance of Jesus as the One the prophets spoke of. Still, many Jews did not understand, so Jesus again explains His relationship with the Father:

> When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am (**ἐγὼ εἰμί**, *egō eimi*) the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me. [29] The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him. (8:28-29)

Once more the NIV translators, in order to make clear the sense of the passage, added the words, "*the one I claim to be*." As a result of the words of Jesus, John says, "many put their faith in him" (8:30). Then to the Jews who believed, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. [32] Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (8:31-32). What truth would make them free? If they accepted the truth that Jesus had **come from the Father** and that He was **the Christ**, then they would not die in their sins. In other words, if they accepted that Jesus is the One He claimed to be, then they could have eternal life—acceptance of this truth would set them free.

We must accept this teaching if we wish eternal life. Jesus went on to say: "So, if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (8:36). Many of the Jews just refused to accept Jesus. In fact, some cried out: "Abraham is our father" (8:39). Jesus responds to their statement by saying:

> "If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "**then you would do the things Abraham did**. [40] As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. [41] You are doing the things your own father does." (8:39-41a)

How did Abraham react to the announcement concerning the coming of the Messiah? He rejoiced and was glad. On the other hand, the Jews sought to kill Jesus. Thus, the Jews who refused to believe were of their father, the devil. In response to their negative reaction as to His claims, Jesus said to them:

> If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me. [43] Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. [44] You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. [45] Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! [46] Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? [47] He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God. (8:42-47)

CONCLUSION

Many did not even know their own Messiah as He stood before them. Certainly, Abraham saw the birth of the Messiah. More conversation follows these remarks in 8:42-47. Jesus zeros in on Abraham's faith. He told the Jews: "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (8:56). They were dumbfounded by this comment. They questioned Him by saying: "You are not yet fifty years old, and you have seen Abraham!" (8:57). Then Jesus issued a statement that cemented His claim about being the Messiah sent forth from God: "I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, I am" [**ἐγὼ εἰμί**, *egō eimi*] (8:58). **ἐγὼ εἰμί**, *egō eimi* = "I exist." Yes, Jesus identifies Himself as the Messiah by saying: "I am he" (*egō eimi*, vv. 24, 28). Jesus is saying, in effect, that I am the One that "Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (8:56). Emil Brunner (1889-1966), an eminent and highly influential Swiss Protestant (Reformed) theologian, captures the essence of the coming of Jesus in his remarks in his book, *The Mediator*:

> The assault of God upon the world is Jesus Christ. This is the meaning of revelation and atonement. He is the Divine King who thus establishes His sovereignty, and is so doing sets humanity free from the powers which are hostile to God and therefore also hostile to life.[517]

In John 8:24, 28, and 58, Jesus is simply saying, "I am he" (**ἐγὼ εἰμί**, *egō eimi*). In other words, I am the One whom Abraham saw. Jesus not only proclaimed His preexistence, but He also proclaimed Himself as the One whom Abraham foresaw. Is it any wonder that Jesus said that if you do not believe that "I am he," you will die in your sins? Have you accepted this One who is called God (John 1:1)? Have we accepted this One who created all things (1:2)? Have we received the One who turned water into wine (2:1-11)? Have we acknowledged the One who walked on water (6:16-21)?

Have we recognized the One who raised Lazarus from the dead (11:38-44)? Have we trusted in the One who cured the eyesight of one born blind (9:1-12)? Have we accepted the One who fed 5,000 with just five small loaves and two fishes (6:1-15)? If not, why not receive Him so that you may have eternal life (8:31-32)? Do we believe that before Abraham was born that Jesus existed? Do we believe that Jesus is the "I AM" of John 8:58? If so, then we need to acknowledge this truth and become a disciple of the Messiah, the savior of the world (3:16-21). His miracles prove His assertion— **ἐγὼ εἰμί**.

> To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. [32] Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." [33] They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants[a] and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?" [34] Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin. [35] Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. [36] So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. [37] I know you are Abraham's descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me,

[517]Emil Brunner, *The Mediator: A Study of the Central Doctrine of the Christian Faith* (1934, reprinted (London: Lutterworth Press, 1952), 553.

a Greek *seed*; also in verse 37

because you have no room for my word. [38] I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you do what you have heard from your father." [b] (8:31-38)

The next chapter (20) examines a well-known Scripture that is frequently cited by many Christians to teach that in order for there to be fellowship between the various splinter-groups within the Churches of Christ, there must be unanimity of opinion. This postulation is based upon a faulty reading of Amos' words to the nation of Israel—"Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3, KJV). This chapter explores its historical background as well as the Hebrew word for "agreed." This in-depth study is not designed to question the sincerity of those who advocate a meaning not found in the context, but rather, the objective is to help Christians understand the author's intended meaning in order for Christians to promote the unity that Jesus prayed for His people.

b Or *presence. Therefore do what you have heard from the Father.*

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Walking Together

Proof-texting is one of the most prevalent methods of giving validity to many odd interpretations found within the fellowship of many Christians. One such Scripture is Amos 3:3. This text is often employed to justify separation from other believers when there is disagreement over doctrinal interpretations concerning cherished traditions. This is just one of the many passages of Scripture that is frequently abused by many sincere, well-meaning believers.[518] This chapter seeks to examine the context of Amos 3:3 and to review the various authors who rely upon their interpretation of Amos 3:3 to uphold their actions of rejection of other Christians for refusing to conform to the status quo of a particular party line. Carl Ketcherside (1908-1989), editor and author, is perfectly right when he sets forth his caveat of the art of sermon-making by which Scriptures are tortured to maintain the status quo of splinter groups:

> The art of sermon-making, a skill wholly unknown to the new covenant scriptures, has led its practitioners far afield in their ardent pursuit of texts. When one is found which seems to suit the propaganda purpose of the hour, they operate and remove it from the contextual body, and by injections of their own intellectual distillate seek to make it develop into a new body of its own. No creation of homiletic fantasy better illustrates this than the use of Amos 3:3 by modern advocates of unity based upon conformity.[519]

KING JAMES VERSION

The King James Version renders this verse: "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (אִם־נוֹעָדוּ, ʾim-·nô·ʿā′·ḏû) unless they have **made an appointment**, Amos 3:3).[520] Surface reading appears to support the assertions by many God-fearing men and women that unless there is agreement, then there can be no

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[518]For a classic example of misapplication of Amos 3:3 in order to uphold one's sectarian spirit against other believers is found in the writings of J. A. McNutt. See his essay, "Can We Walk Together," *Firm Foundation* 102, no. 22 (September 24, 1985): 7 [567], where he writes:

> "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). . . . Where there is no agreement with the will of God, there can be no communion or fellowship with their Lord. . . . Another pertinent question at this point regarding fellowship would be, "How can we walk together with those who are not walking (or living) according to the word of God? . . . It is also clearly stated that, "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he has both the Father and the Son" (2 John 9). . . . Unity is a wonderful thing and much to be desired, but should never be sought by sacrificing God's truth, or by compromise with error.

Another example is from the late Ira Y. Rice, Jr., (1917-2001), who also advanced the same mindset and abuse of Amos 3:3 to give validity to his castigation of Christians who could not subscribe to his odd interpretations attached to many Scriptures. For this illustration, see Ira Y. Rice, Jr., CAN TWO FAITHS POSSIBLY BE ACCEPTABLE? *Contending for the Faith XXVI*, no. 8 (August 1995): 3, where he says, "The merest tyro acquainted with Amos 3:3 should be able to understand that two CANNOT walk together except they be agreed!"

[519]Carl Ketcherside, "Except They Be Agreed," *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 11 (November 1965): 162-163.

[520]*The King James Version*, (Cambridge: Cambridge) 1769.

fellowship. This Scripture is alluded to in order to substantiate almost every division within the community of the redeemed. For example, the following is a list of problems in which Christians withdraw association: the use of individual communion cups versus the common cup, the employment of wine instead of grape juice, the breaking of the loaf instead of pinching the loaf, the acceptance of the "exception rule" in Matthew 5:32 versus those who reject this particular rule as applicable to the Christian dispensation,[521] the adoption of Sunday school classes versus those who reject the employment of Sunday school as an innovation, the use of the instrument in singing versus the rejection of the instrument (acappella), the support of Bible colleges, the support of orphan homes, and so on.[522] This list is almost infinitum.

For Christians who rely on this verse to substantiate their sectarian attitudes toward other believers is based upon isolation of a text out of context. The King James rendering of the passage is misleading, especially if we fail to consult the context. When we attempt to exegete this Scripture, we must always place ourselves into the mind frame of the author and stand upon his threshold and look through his eyes. We must study with precise attention the prophet's language. Where differences of opinion have prevailed for hundreds of years, we must not allow *a priori* (made before or without examination—not supported by factual study) assumptions of what ought to be found in this verse, or what ought not to be found there.

INDOCTRINATION VERSUS HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the examination of any text, the author should be permitted to explain himself. Many interpreters are so full of ideas drawn from past traditions, so impregnated from beliefs of past ages, so indoctrinated from well-

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[521]Even though the following citations do not cite Amos 3:3, nevertheless, the mindset for such outlandish behavior is founded on Amos 3:3. When I labored (approximately seventeen years) among these believers, Amos 3:3 was cited to justify separation on many trivial issues. The following is an account of one division that should never have taken place. I was acquainted with all of the men listed (one possible exception is Glen Bray) in the following citation from Paul Nichols, *Fifty Years of Service* (Oakdale CA: Paul Nichols, 1992), 98, where he says:

> At the next annual meeting at Sulphur Oklahoma, several brethren met together. **Glen Bray**, **Fred Kirbo** [1912-1968] and **Barney Welch** [1915-1992] represented the no exception position. Edwin Morris [1922-2008], Clovis, **Don McCord** and **Ronny Wade [1936-2020)** represented the exception position—divorce for the cause of fornication. At this meeting it was pointed out to Fred that it was inconsistent for him to be out of fellowship with Edwin [Edwin Morris—1922-2008] and still fellowship those who believed as he did. So Fred withdrew from the rest of us at that time and did not fellowship us until the day he died of a heart attack while in a meeting at Warsaw, Missouri, October 26, 1968, at the age of 56 years.

Paul Nichols also cites an example of how Christians in the one-cup and non-Sunday school movement—all of equal devotion to Christ—divided over another issue known as the so-called "order of worship." Again he captures the parting of the ways by equally godly men, ibid., 90:

> Since he [**Homer A. Gay**, 1894-1958] had already taken his stand against the unauthorized practices of the class system and cups on the Lord's table, it is no wonder when he became concerned when co-editor of the *Old Paths Advocate*, Brother **J. D. Phillips** [1904-1981], began contending for an unvarying set order of worship. Brother Gay did not want to see the unity of the brotherhood disturbed. The battle for truth to gain this unity had been hard fought. He would not stand by and let it be disrupted without expressing opposition. . . . Although the division over the order of worship was extremely regrettable and the brotherhood suffered for it, something had to be done.

[522]See **Garland Elkins** (1926-2016), "Changing Attitudes Toward Fellowship," in **Bobby Liddell**, Editor, *Changes In the Church of Christ*, Nineteenth Annual Bellview Lectures, Pensacola, Florida, June 11-15, 1995 (Pensacola, FL: Austin McGary & Company, 1994), 140, where he goes right to the heart of justifying division among Christians with Amos 3:3:

> Are the faithful churches of Christ and the denominations agreed? If not, how can there be fellowship between them? Are the faithful brethren and erring brethren agreed? If not, how can there be fellowship between them? Amos wrote: "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). If they are not agreed, how can there be fellowship between them?

known preachers, and so full of desire to find what is not manifestly there that it is impossible to see the text clearly in its historical context. Cedric B. Johnson makes the following succinct observation about presuppositions:

> My contention is that conflicting theological positions are in part due to the fact that we all approach a text, sacred or secular, with our strong subjective biases. Even though we have a commitment to read the Bible on its own terms; and even though we want the Divine and human authors to speak for themselves, somehow we still come up with contradictory views on some issues. . . . Most people are familiar with the idea of "seeing" what you want to see or viewing a situation through "colored glasses." The assumption is that our perceptions of the real world can be distorted at times.[523]

James Montgomery Boice (1938-2000), pastor and articulate spokesman for the Reformed faith, correctly brings out the obvious implication of Amos 3:3 when he writes: "Amos' points are quite obvious. If people meet in order to go walking, it is by prior arrangement. If they have not agreed to meet, the walk will not take place."[524] James Luther Mays has correctly observed:

> The first seven questions range across happenings, which common experience and outlook would connect self-evidently with another event. When two men are seen making their way across the horizon of Judah's empty hill country, one knows they could hardly have met except by appointing a time and place (v.3).[525]

Hans Walter Wolff also expresses the concept by the Hebrew word that is translated "agreed" in the KJV: "יעד (yʿd) niphal (simple passive) usually means 'to make an appointment,' but later connotes 'to meet (by appointment), to assemble.'"[526] Regarding this same concept, C. F. Keil (1807-1888) writes:

> The examples are evidently selected with the view of showing that the utterances of the prophet originate with God. This is obvious enough in vers. 7, 8. The first clause, "Do two men walk together, without having agreed as to their meeting?" (נוֹעָדוּ, *nôʿāḏû*, to betake one's self to a place to meet together at an appointed place or an appointed time; compare Job ii. 11, Josh. xi. 5, Neh. vi. 2; not merely to agree together), contains something more than the trivial truth, that two persons do not take a walk together without a previous arrangement. The two who walk together are Jehovah and the prophet (Cyril); not Jehovah and the nation, to which the judgment is predicted.[527]

John H. Hayes, too, has pungently captured the essence of Amos' use of the rhetorical questions concerning the inevitability of God's judgment upon the nation of Israel with the following scenario:

> The series of questions opens in verse 3 with an interrogative statement which may be seen as a neutral or rather banal way of getting the series going. Only verse 3 is composed of a single question; the others occur in pairs. Since there are seven questions in verses 3-6, one question had to stand alone.
>
> Various translations have been proposed for verse 3, depending upon how one understands the situation envisioned in the question. The translation offered above is the one most widely found but its straightforward meaning—"Can two people walk together unless they meet?"—appears so simplistic that one wonders how it would have functioned to entice an audience's attention. The verb *hlk* can denote various forms of movement including walking. Similarly, [yʿd] ***yud*** can mean "meet" but also "designate", "appoint," in the sense of making arrangements about something (see Exod. 21:8-9). One could thus translate the verse as "Can two people go on a journey together without having made arrangements?"[528]

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[523]Cedric B. Johnson, *The Psychology of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 42.

[524]James Montgomery Boice, *Minor Prophets*, Two Volumes Complete in One Edition (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1986), 150.

[525]James Luther Mays, *Amos* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 60.

[526]Hans Walter Wolff, *A Commentary on the Books of the Prophets Joel and Amos*, Hermeneia, Translated by Waldemar Janzen, S. Dean McBride, Jr., and Charles A. Muenchow, S. Dean McBride, Jr., ed (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 179.

[527]C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Twelve Minor Prophets*, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, 10 Volumes, originally published 1866-91 (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1996), 260.

[528]John H. Hayes, *Amos: The Eight-Century Prophet: His Times and His Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1958), 124.

For Christians to cite Amos 3:3 to justify separation from other believers who disagree with a particular brand of orthodoxy as advanced by certain groups is to abuse Amos 3:3. We must do more than just surface reading if we wish to arrive at a correct application of a particular passage. We must go "behind" the text before we go "in front" of the text. If we start "in front" for our exegetical studies, then we very well may misapply the intent of the author. Just a brief analysis reveals the intent of Amos as he proposes certain rhetorical questions in order to elicit a positive response as to the present status of Israel as she faces God's judgment.

ANALYSIS OF AMOS 3:3-8

Cause and Effect Arguments

The first question by Amos (760 BC) opens in verse three with an implied answer. The first interrogative statement may be seen as a way of initiating the series. Only verse three is composed of a single question—the travelers. On the other hand, the other verses (4-6) occur in pairs: two lions (verse 4ab), two traps (verse 5ab), and two questions to danger (verse 6ab). These analogies are presented to demonstrate the connection between the prophet's proclamation and the activity of God. In verse 3, we do not notice any element of force involved in the first question. Yet, on the other hand, the next two questions in verse 4 develop the well-known fact of a lion that overpowers another animal. The next two questions in verse 5 surrounds the hunter's vanquishing of animal prey.

The rhetorical nature of the questions renders the "cause" indisputable. Up to this point (verses 3-5), the cause is always deduced from the effect. Amos is stressing that no event is self-explanatory; there is always a cause for the effect. His adversaries denied that his appearance had anything to do with God's proclamation. Amos went, as it were, to the beginning of his prophetic ministry in order to establish the grounds for the validity of his calling by Yahweh. In a nutshell, we can say that 3:3-8 is justification for his ministry. In this section, Amos asks seven rhetorical questions and the answers to all of them were "no." Just a casual reading of the pericope (a selection of Scripture) reveals that Amos puts the effect before the cause. In other words, the cause, in these rhetorical questions, always follows the effect. We might say that for every effect there is a cause.

Seven Rhetorical Questions

This message of Amos demonstrates the **cause-and-effect** character of his ministry. The prophet puts forth a series of illustrations drawn from the world of nature to make obvious that "God cannot be mocked." Over seven hundred years after Amos' ministry, Paul, too, illustrates this same principle to the Galatians: "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows" (Galatians 6:7). Amos, through his seven rhetorical questions, proves beyond the shadow of a doubt that God's judgment is inevitable. Election carries with it responsibility. It is in this vein that Elizabeth Achtemeier (1926-2002), Adjunct Professor of Bible and Homiletics at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, captures the relevancy of Amos' penetrating questions to the Christian community today:

> That God will judge us for failing to meet the responsibilities of our election should be a sobering thought for the Christian Church, for, like Israel, we, too, have been chosen by God to be a kingdom of priest and a holy nation, that we may declare God's wonderful deeds to all the world (1 Pet. 2:9-10). Like Israel, we, too, in our redemption have been adopted as sons and daughters of God, and have been allowed to call God "Father" (Gal. 4:4-7). Because of the work of Jesus Christ, which has grafted us into the root of Israel (Rom. 11:17-24), made us citizens of Israel's commonwealth (Eph. 2:11-12), and allowed us to share the name of "the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16), we Christians can now claim to be among the elect (cf. Rom. 8:33; 2 Tim. 2:10; 2 Pet. 1:10). But as our Lord tells us in Luke 12:48, "From everyone who

has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked."[529]

Amos paints a picture that we can see—every effect has its cause and every cause has its effect. Once more, consider the following rhetorical questions:

- Do two walk together (**effect**) unless they have agreed to do so (**cause**) [3:3]?
- Does a lion roar in the thicket (**effect**) when he has no prey (**cause**)? Does he growl in his den (**effect**) when he has caught nothing (**cause**) [3:4]?
- Does a bird fall into a trap on the ground (**effect**) where no snare has been set (**cause**)? Does a trap spring up from the earth (**effect**) when there is nothing to catch (**cause**) [3:5]?
- When a trumpet sounds in a city (**cause**), do not the people tremble (**effect**)? When disaster comes to a city (**effect**), has not the LORD caused it (**cause**) [3:6]?

As we reflect upon the impact of Amos's employment of cause-and-effect arguments, perhaps a statement from Carl Ketcherside captures the force of Amos' arguments: "The divine appointment is that inevitably the sin and its punishment must meet."[530] With these illustrations, Amos presses the relationship between cause and effect. For Amos, all of the cause-and-effect arguments are self-evident truths, truths acknowledged by all. The cause-and-effect argument in Amos 3:3 is a depiction of two men walking together. His argument, so it seems, is this: The plausibility of two men walking together would not occur unless they had previously made an arrangement (appointment) to do so. Christian writer Leroy Garrett (b. 1918), author and editor, has penned some compelling words that need to be heard:

> The verse in question is the first of these cause-and-effect steps. Two men walk together (effect) because they have made an appointment—or because they have agreed to meet (cause).
>
> The point being made is that Amos, only a herdsman and farmer, is prophesying (effect) because he has a very good reason—the Lord has spoken, calling him as a prophet (cause). If one can understand that two men will not be meeting in a remote airport terminal unless they have made arrangements, then he would be able to understand that Amos would not be prophesying if the Lord had not called him. A lion does not roar for no reason, nor are people frightened without a cause. Since I am prophesying, it is because the Lord has called me. This is what Amos is saying.[531]

To illustrate the above scenario from Garrett with a personal illustration should help one to grasp rather quickly the teaching of Amos 3:3. In April 1988, I agreed to meet Ervin Waters (1918-2020), who is from Texas, at the airport terminal in Birmingham, AL, on Sunday morning at 8:30am. We met, we talked, and we walked. Thus, our walking together (effect) came about as the result of our appointment previously made (cause). This story illustrates Amos' saying, "Do two walk together unless they have made an appointment?"[532] This verse has nothing to do with our agreement, which is the way many writers make use of this famous passage.

In spite of the voluminous translations and commentaries, which shed tremendous insight as to the intent of Amos, nevertheless, there are still large numbers of trustworthy believers who still cite Amos 3:3 to justify castigation, censure, ostracism, and removal of the dissident from their fellowship. Even though Amos is quoted by many godly men and women to maintain the purity of the party, this misunderstanding, so it seems, is not a deliberate rejection of God's Word, but rather, this lack of correct comprehension is simply an honest mistake of the heart. Many Christians are so used to reading the Bible as they have been taught by generations of interpreters that it is difficult to read the Bible without colored glasses.

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[529]Elizabeth Achtemeier (1926-2002), *Minor Prophets*, in the New International Biblical Commentary (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1996), 190.

[530]Carl Ketcherside, "Except They Be Agreed," *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 11 (November 1965): 162.

[531]Leroy Garrett, "Can Two Walk Together Except They Be Agreed," *Restoration Review* 17, no. 7 (September 1975): 123.

[532]*The New Revised Standard Version*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 1989.

The innumerable traditions of the countless splinter groups have made it almost impossible, if not impossible, to read the Word of God accurately. We might also add that this is especially true with religious leaders—elders and preachers. The leaders of the numerous movements (at least twenty-five factions within the Churches of Christ) have a difficult time hearing God correctly. Justo L. Gonzalez, a United Methodist minister born in Cuba, expresses most concisely the necessity of weighing carefully our traditions, past or present. He writes:

> Without understanding the past, we are unable to understand ourselves, for in a sense the past still lives in us and influences who we are and how we are and how we understand the Christian message. The notion that we read the New Testament exactly as the early Christians did, without any weight of tradition coloring our interpretation, is an illusion. It is also a dangerous illusion, for it tends to absolutize our interpretation, confusing it with the Word of God. . . . Likewise, if we are to break free from an undue weight of tradition, we must begin by understanding what the tradition is, how we came to be where we are, and how particular elements in our past color our view of the present.[533]

DICTIONARY MEANING OF "AGREED"

Various Translations of Amos 3:3

Before investigating more fully the unique interpretation placed upon Amos 3:3 by many Christians within the Churches of Christ, it would be beneficial to search more closely the scholars to determine the definition of the word יָעַד (yā·ʿăḏ, "agreed"). The sole question of the interpreter of Amos' famous saying must be the intent of the author. What meaning did he intend to convey by the Hebrew word יָעַד? The English word *agreed* is from the Hebrew יָעַד, which means: "to fix upon (by agreement or appointment); by impl. To meet (at a stated time) . . . gather (selves, together), meet (together), set (a time)."[534] The basic meaning is to make an "appointment," not unanimity in understanding every Scripture with exactitude. Amos is dealing with two people making an appointment to walk together.

Sometimes it is helpful to consult other translations in order to observe the particular flavor of a word. For instance, the **New International Version** renders this text: "Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so?" The **New Revised Standard Version** translates the Hebrew: "Do two walk together unless they have made an appointment?"[535] The **New Jerusalem Bible** interprets the passage this way: "Do two people travel together unless they have agreed to do so?"[536] One more translation is in order to fully establish the meaning of the original intent of the Hebrew word יָעַד that is translated in the King James Version as "agreed." The New American Standard Bible reads: "Do two men walk together unless they have **made an appointment**?"[537]

The root יָעַד (yā·ʿăḏ) occurs four times in the book of Exodus and eighteen times in the Old Testament.[538] Armstrong, Busby, and Carr define יָעַד (yā·ʿăḏ) as "to meet at an appointed place" in Exodus 25:22; 29:42, 43;[539] in Joshua 11:5, "to assemble by appointment";[540] in 2 Samuel 20:5, "to appoint";[541] and in

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[533]Justo L. Gonzalez (b. 1937), *The Story of Christianity*, vol., 1 (San Francisco: Harper, 1984), xvii.

[534]James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible: Hebrew and Chaldee Dictionary*, Strong's number 3259 (New York: Abingdon, 1958), 50.

[535]*The New Revised Standard Version*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 1989.

[536]The New Jerusalem Bible: Reader's Edition, (New York: Doubleday.) 1990.

[537]*The New American Standard Bible*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1977.

[538]See Terry A. Armstrong, Douglas L. Busby, Cyril F. Carr, *A Reader's Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, four volumes in One (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 49.

[539]Ibid., 43, 49.

[540]Ibid., 131.

[541]Ibid., 176.

Amos 3:3, "to meet by appointment."[542] Also, it is informative to observe what Holladay writes: "agree, have an appointment, Amos 3.2."[543]

Examples of the Use of This Hebrew Root (יעד) Word (יָעַד)

An analysis of several Scriptures in which the root יעד (יָעַד, yā·ʿăḏ), occurs should help one in determining the correct meaning to this particular word (יָעַד, yā·ʿăḏ). In the book of Exodus, Moses informs the people of Israel that they were to "Make an atonement cover of pure gold—two and a half cubits long and a cubit and a half wide (25:17). This ark was then placed in the sanctuary. God in detailing this significance of the ark, said to Moses: "There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet (אִוָּעֵד [ʾiw·wā·ʿēḏ, future tense] with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites" (Exodus 25:22). Moses employs the Hebrew root יעד (יָעַד, yā·ʿăḏ), that is utilized by Amos. Then, following these instructions, God also informed Moses that he would meet him at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting:

> For the generations to come this burnt offering is to be made regularly at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting before the LORD. There I will meet (אִוָּעֵד (ʾiw·wā·ʿēḏ) you and speak to you; there also I will meet with the Israelites, and the place will be consecrated by my glory. (Exodus 29:42-43)

Yet again, we observe the Hebrew root יעד used by God is the same word as employed by Amos (3:3). We also notice that as Joshua explains the defeat of the northern kings by the children of Israel, he employs the same root verb (יָעַד, yā·ʿăḏ), in his description of the kings joining forces against Israel:

> They came out with all their troops and a large number of horses and chariots—a huge army, as numerous as the sand on the seashore. All these kings **joined** (וַיִּוָּעֲדוּ (wăy·yiw·wā·ʿăḏw′) forces and made camp together at the Waters of Merom, to fight against Israel. (Joshua 11:4-5)

These kings assembled by appointment. Thomas Finley, author of an exegetical commentary on Amos, reminds his readers that the Targum (Aramaic version of the Old Testament) renders the verb יָעַד (yā·ʿăḏ) in Amos 3:3 with the following translation: "unless they have made an appointment to meet together."[544] Another scholar, Thomas Edward McComiskey, taught Old Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, makes the following succinct observation of the verb "walk":

> The first question (v.3) asks whether two can walk together if they have not agreed to do so. The word "walk" is in the imperfect tense in Hebrew, denoting incompleted action. The question is, Is it customary for two to walk together without agreeing to do so? Certainly two people walking side by side would not be doing so only by sheer coincidence.[545]

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF AMOS 3:3

As we seek to uncover the meaning attached to any particular passage, we should seek to understand the historical background, if possible, of the Scripture(s) in question. Hopefully, this investigation will shed light on the meaning to attribute to a particular word, especially if an interpretation of the citation depends on the meaning assigned to a specific word. This principle is extremely helpful in seeking

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[542]Ibid., 371.

[543]William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 137.

[544]Thomas J. Finley, *Joel, Amos, Obadiah*, The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1990), 182.

[545]Thomas Edward McComiskey, *Amos,* The Expositor's Bible Commentary, volume 7, ed., Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 298.

to uncover a correct interpretation of Amos 3:3. The historical background should shed some light on the meaning we should designate to the word *agreed* as employed in the KJV.

At the time of the writing of this Book (760 BC), both Israel and Judah still existed as nations. Israel (Northern Kingdom) met its final end in 721 BC by the Assyrians. Yet, Judah (Southern Kingdom) did not completely fall until 586 BC under the power of the Babylonians. At the time of Amos' call to the prophetic office, he was a citizen of Judah, and, yet, he prophesied in the Northern Kingdom. The first verse of Amos, together with 7:10-13, places Amos in the middle of the eighth century (760 BC) with Uzziah, king of Judah (792-740) and Jeroboam II, king of Israel (793-798).[546] Jeroboam was fourteen years contemporary with Amaziah and twenty-seven years contemporary with Uzziah, both kings of Judah. Jeroboam's religious leadership, like the first Jeroboam, intentionally encouraged the practices of fertility cults (2 Kings 14:25-25). The social life of the nation was portrayed by adultery, theft, and murder by the government.

Amos disclosed the spiritual corruption under the religious formalism and material prosperity of the time (Amos 5:12, 21). He rebuked the leaders for the deterioration of social justice and morality. Amos, as it were, goes right to the jugular vein of covetousness in order to get the attention of Jeroboam and his leaders. Listen to the prophet as he spells out some of their crimes:

> They sell the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. 7 They trample on the heads of the poor as upon the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed. Father and son use the same girl and so profane my holy name. (2:6-7)

Again, listen to him as he enumerates the utter degradation of the society of Israel: "You who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground" (5:7); then he adds: "you hate the one who reproves in court and despise him who tells the truth. 11 You trample on the poor and force him to give you grain" (5:10-11). Once more, he calls attention the very core of corruption within the judicial system among its leaders: "For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts" (5:12).

In Chapter 7, Amos reveals that Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, accused him of raising a conspiracy in the Northern Kingdom. He dismissed Amos as a prophet for hire whom he did not need to take seriously (7:12). Amos responded to this accusation by saying, "I was neither a prophet nor a prophet's son, but I was a shepherd, and I also took care of sycamore-fig trees. 15 But the LORD took me from tending the flock" (7:14-15a). Again, God speaks to Amos and tells him to prophecy against Israel: "Go, prophesy to my people Israel" (7:15b). Thus, Amos cries out: "Now then, hear the word of the LORD. You say, 'Do not prophesy against Israel, and stop preaching against the house of Isaac'" (7:16).

Beginning with Chapters 1 and 2, Amos proclaims God's vengeance upon Damascus (1:3), Gaza (1:6), Tyre (1:9), Edom (1:11), Ammon (1:13), Moab (2:1), Judah (2:4), and Israel (2:6). God accused Judah for rejecting His law and for not keeping His decrees (2:4). God also condemned Israel for its egregious behavior in the area of social injustice (2:6b). The first eight verses of Chapter 3 contain two messages. These messages provide the background and purpose of Amos' activity as a prophet of God to the nations. First, Amos reminds the Israelites that their deliverance out of Egypt was strictly as a result of God's grace (3:1-2). Israel failed to understand that God's grace demanded responsibility on their part in carrying out God's instructions from His law. We can hardly reflect upon God's condemnation of Israel without reflection upon the words of Jesus as he addressed a crowd of several thousand (Luke 12:1) in which He calls attention to this very principle of privilege: "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked" (12:48b).

[546]See John H. Walton, *Chronological and Background Charts of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 29-31. The dates adopted from this book are those assigned by Thiele.

Election Syndrome

God bestowed upon Israel many privileges: salvation from slavery, special relationship with Himself, a new land flowing with milk and honey, and so on. Not only had God blessed Israel, but He also blessed Judah with the same blessings. God, too, called Judah to serve Him and to represent Him and His holiness to other nations, but Judah failed in their responsibilities to uphold the holiness of God in their day-to-day transactions. Thus God sent Amos to get their attention through the use of cause-and-effect arguments to utterly tear down any defense that Israel and Judah might put forth to try to justify their immoral behavior or ignore the teachings of God. Both nations suffered from what is commonly referred to today as the "election syndrome." In other words, the two nations assumed that their dishonorable behavior did not negate their standing before God.

This kind of reasoning is somewhat on par with the reasoning of many Christians today who advance the notion that since salvation is "once for all," then God will overlook disobedience. Amos says "no" to such foolish thinking. For Amos, one could not reject God's ethical standards without impunity. Amos is saying that when we act in such a way to dishonor God, we can depend on God to take action against such atrocities. How did Amos go about driving home their misconceptions over the so-called "election syndrome"? He did this through cause-and-effect arguments.

All of the arguments were self-evident. Through the employment of cause-and-effect arguments, Amos was able to prepare these two nations for the impending tragedy that was around the corner for Israel (721 BC) and Judah (586 BC). In order to set forth the scenario of destruction, Amos proceeds to lay down a number of arguments in which he sets forth the effect with the cause behind the effect. Before he announces any further judgment upon the nation of Israel, he seeks to establish his right and duty to prophesy by calling forth a chain-like series of similes drawn from life. Listen to him as he seeks to highlight his prophetic office and to illustrate the inevitable consequences of God's rejection of Israel and Judah:

> Do two walk together unless they have agreed to do so? [4] Does a lion roar in the thicket when he has no prey? Does he growl in his den when he has caught nothing? [5] Does a bird fall into a trap on the ground where no snare has been set? Does a trap spring up from the earth when there is nothing to catch? [6] When a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble? When disaster comes to a city, has not the LORD caused it? [7] Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets. [8] The lion has roared—who will not fear? The Sovereign LORD has spoken—who can but prophesy? (Amos 3:3-8)

UNIQUE INTERPRETATIONS

When we review the various "party" journals within the Churches of Christ, we quickly become cognizant that we must learn to reevaluate and reinterpret the traditions handed down to the Christian community. Today, each distinct group (approximately twenty-five) within the Churches of Christ maintains that its beliefs constitutes the "doctrine of Christ," that is to say, the distinctive teaching of Christ about the specifics in a so-called worship service and organizational structure of the church. Thus, according to each splinter group, to disagree with its own particular interpretation is tantamount to disagreeing with the Word of God itself. In this basic assumption, many identify what has been handed down through the centuries as synonymous with the Scriptures.

In other words, our interpretation and the Word of God are on par with each other. In examining the traditional interpretation of Amos 3:3, we must not confuse a tradition from the forefathers with the text itself. Subconsciously, equally godly men and women substitute their interpretation(s) with Holy Scripture, not deliberately, but, nevertheless, this methodology of handling the Scriptures is the same. Many Christians today are so used to reading the Scriptures as they have been taught by generations of interpreters that it is difficult not to substitute the traditions for the Word of God itself. The hand-me-down interpretations from the church fathers make it difficult, if not almost impossible, for many sincere believers to read the Word of God accurately.

We may think that we have found a text (Amos 3:3) that gives credence for a narrow concept of fellowship, but when we apply Amos 3:3 for this purpose, then we are reading into the text our own understanding, or perception. In other words, we are reading into the text our own presuppositions, our own prejudices, our own likes and our dislikes, and so on. **We cease to interpret the text by foisting upon the particular passage our brand of prevailing attitude.** To make the text mean something that the text does not mean is to abuse the text.[547]

Once we equate our interpretation with the Word itself, then these traditions are forced upon other believers under the threat of excommunication. The practices of the various divisions within the Stone/Campbell Movement have made it almost impossible for us to read the Word of God without spectacles. Many editors, elders, and preachers have difficulty hearing God accurately because of their heritage. On the other hand, there are many editors, elders, and preachers who seek to hear the writings of God, but many of these men and women also come under the scrutiny of the powerful. Today, we dare not question the interpretation, or rationalization, of many editors, elders, or preachers without fear of retaliation. This philosophy is not isolated to one particular faction, or division, within the Churches of Christ as well as other religious bodies. For us to question the status quo is to question the validity of Scripture.[548]

Subjective Distortions of Amos 3:3

A casual look at the various religious journals within the Stone/Campbell Movement reveals subjective distortions of Amos 3:3. Christians continue to cite this Scripture to justify separation, or disconnection, within God's family. If we take the traditional view of this passage, then the question that concerns every believer is: Are there any exceptions to the general rule enunciated by many writers in their application of this passage? We frequently witness Christians walking together in spite of differences within their own fellowship. Even though many divisions within the Churches of Christ utilize this Scripture, nevertheless, we immediately discover that none apply this principle in an absolute sense. Just how do we harmonize our theories of fellowship with the words of Amos?

Again, we must ask the following question: Is the intent of this passage (Amos 3:3) to teach that there must be perfect agreement before walking unitedly? Can individuals walk together without unanimity of agreement? Do we violate the unanimity of agreement when we do not always agree on every interpretation of Scripture? Or do we resist this Scripture when we disagree with others in so-called secular matters? For instance, do husbands and wives walk together, even when they disagree? Can Christians walk together when they do not see every Scripture "eye-to-eye?"

Paul Discredits the Traditional Interpretation

The answer is a resounding "yes." Just a cursory glance at the writings of Paul explodes the traditional interpretation of Amos 3:3. **An analysis of Romans 14 and 15, along with 1 Corinthians 8, reveals that Christians are encouraged to work together in spite of differences in many theological areas**. For instance, we should reflect upon the following statements from these two books:

> Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. (Romans 14:1)
>
> Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. (14:3)

[547]See Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1982), 22. This book is extremely important in assisting one in the proper methods of correct interpretation of the Bible.

[548]For a more detailed study of this philosophy, see Dallas Burdette, "Where the Scriptures Speak," in *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2008), 87-152. .

> Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand (14:4).
>
> Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. (14:5)
>
> Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. (14:10)
>
> We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. [2] Each of us must please our neighbor for the good purpose of building up the neighbor. [3] For Christ did not please himself. (15:1-2)
>
> May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, [6] so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (15:5-6)
>
> Now concerning food sacrificed to idols: we know that all of us possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. [2] Anyone who claims to know something does not yet have the necessary knowledge; [3]but anyone who loves God is known by him. (1 Corinthians 8:1-3)
>
> Hence, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that no idol in the world really exists, and that there is no God but one. [5] Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as in fact there are many gods and many lords— [6] yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. (8:4-6)
>
> It is not everyone, however, who has this knowledge. Since some have become so accustomed to idols until now, they still think of the food they eat as food offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. [8] Food will not bring us close to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. [9] But take care that this liberty of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. (8:7-9)

These Scriptures, once and for all, nail the coffin shut on the traditional explanation of Amos 3:3. Paul sets forth in these two epistles the necessity of exercising the "spirit of toleration" within the Christian community. He wanted them to walk together in spite of differences. Even those who cite Amos 3:3 to bolster their factious attitude toward Christians who refuse to kowtow (to kneel in token of homage, worship or deep respect) to outlandish interpretations, we quickly observe that they do not follow their own application in an absolute sense. It is self-evident that when writers or teachers quote Amos 3:3 to justify their disruptive spirit, none apply his or her interpretation in an absolute sense.

For example, some do not concede that it is right for Christians to participate in warfare, or to participate in Bible colleges, or to support orphan homes from the so-called congregational treasury, or to employ individual communion cups, or to participate in the practice of Sunday school, or to allow remarriage for the guilty party in divorce, or to serve leavened bread in the Lord's Supper, or to serve wine in the Lord's Supper, and so on. Yet, in spite of all this diversity, many Christians still walk hand-in-hand with other Christians who do not concur with their particular brand of accepted views.

We speedily detect that we employ a pick-and-choose mentality. In other words, even though countless Christians cite Amos 3:3 to uphold their sectarian attitude toward some believers; nevertheless, this passage is generally interpreted in a relative sense; it all depends on our own concept of orthodoxy. The traditional interpretation turns on the mindset of the person who wants to enforce his or her strange interpretation of Amos 3:3.[549] Yet, we also observe individuals who seek to circumvent their own initial interpretation. Leroy Garrett crisply articulates the inconsistencies advanced by each faction within the Churches of Christ:

> Each of our parties circumvents all this by demanding conformity on "the doctrinal issues," meaning of course the peculiar doctrinal stance of that particular sect. They might differ on what others divide over, while others differ on what

[549]For an examination on how to apply the principles of interpretation, see Dallas Burdette, "False Prophets in the Gospel of Matthew, Who Are They?" (D. Min dissertation, Erskine Theological Seminary, 1999), 36-63.

they divide over, but they make sure that all others line up on what they call the issues or else. Quoting Amos 3:3 of course.[550]

In the early sixties, a close relative of mine justified his separation from me on the basis of Amos 3:3. He advanced the idea that he could not walk me or with others who disagreed with him concerning the issues promoted by his distinctive fellowship of God's people. He cited Amos 3:3 to give credence to his philosophy of departure from me and others. This brother (one cup and non-Sunday school) cited this Scripture against me when I refused to draw lines of fellowship over these issues. In 1998, while visiting his home congregation, I questioned him about the speaker who was conducting a Gospel meeting (Ronny Wade) who held to a different position on the marriage and divorce question than himself. The guest speaker is known for his views on the divorce issue as "the guilty party cannot remarry." On the other hand, the other preacher (Alton Bailey, 1932-2014),[551] believed the opposite position. Yet these two godly men, according to Alton, still walk together. Both of these men are sincere and devout Christians. Yet, they do not hold their differences to be a matter of fellowship. We cannot help but wonder why Amos 3:3 does not apply here. There is no rhyme or reason for the loose application they apply to this text.

Sometimes it is very difficult for us to see inconsistencies in our applications of certain Scriptures. As stated above, years earlier (1960s), Alton Bailey (my first cousin by marriage) cited Amos 3:3 to strengthen his claim for his actions against me over Sunday school and individual communion cups during a Sunday morning service in Birmingham, AL. Yet, he alluded to this passage as an absolute against me and all others who use individual communion cups and Sunday school, but, on the other hand, he makes concession—and still makes concessions—for Ronny Wade who, at that time, thought that the "guilty party cannot remarry." We quickly find that these two believers will not absolutize this Scripture in Amos regarding all differences, only those departures that do not uphold the distinctive fellowship of their persuasion that they deem essential for admission into the eternal kingdom of God.

Alton and I were both taught by the same godly man (E. H. Miller, 1909-1989). Both Alton (1932-2014) and I taught the same faulty interpretation for many years. He was just as sincere then about his interpretation as I am about my new understanding today of this frequently misapplied Scripture. Both of us were brought up on the same diet of misapplied Scriptures. It is impossible for us to maintain the traditional interpretation of Amos 3:3 in an unconditional sense. **This kind of interpretation has to be taught; we cannot learn this from the text**. This Scripture is wrenched from its context in order to give validity to ungodly actions that violate the prayer of Jesus for unity among His disciples.

Another example of inconsistency occurred about twenty-five years ago when I sought to place membership with one of the local congregations (cups and Sunday school Church of Christ) in Montgomery, AL. I was rejected because of my association with Carl Ketcherside (1908-1989) and Leroy Garrett (1918-2015). In addition to this objection, the elders could not agree with me on my position concerning the guilty party in a divorce. **Also, I objected to the position that elders are rulers and that religious leaders are infallible interpreters of the Word of God.** This transaction occurred on a Wednesday evening, but on the following Sunday, the pulpit minister, Dabney Philips (1917-1992), cited Amos 3:3 to uphold the elders' position of rejection.

Yet, this same brother could fellowship Jimmy Allen (1930-2020, 91 years old), professor at Harding University—Church of Christ, who held to a different view concerning the rebaptism controversy.[552] In spite of this disagreement, he held out the right hand of fellowship without citing Amos 3:3. In this scenario, they both walked together, although they were not in agreement on the rebaptism issue. In this particular case, the

[550]Leroy Garrett, "Can Two Walk Together Except They Be Agreed," *Restoration Review* 17, no. 7 (September 1975): 124.

[551]I agree with Alton Bailey (1932-2014) on the belief that the guilty party can remarry. I briefly discussed this with Alton during my visit (10-6-1998) when Ronny Wade (1936-2020) conducted a meeting for the Murphy Ave. Church of Christ in LaGrange, GA.

[552]For a detailed study of rebaptism, see Dallas Burdette (b. 1934), "Rebaptism in the Stone/Campbell Movement," in Dallas Burdette, *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2008), 196-235.

preacher who spoke against me did respond to Jimmy Allen's views with the right attitude. Again, Garrett captures the forbearance that is to saturate the life of every believer:

> *Forbearance* is a Christian virtue that was urged upon the primitive saints again and again, in such terms as "forbearing one another in love" (Eph. 4:2), which shows that differences sometimes ran deep. In a congregation where conformity is the rule there is nothing to forbear. Besides, our acceptance of one another is to be on a kind of "as is" basis, with all our foibles and hang-ups, for that was the ground on which Jesus received us—*even while we were yet sinners.* And so Ro. 15:7: "Receive one another, therefore, as Christ has received you, to the glory of God." That chapter begins by urging: "We who are strong ought to bear with the failing of the weak, and not to please ourselves." The entire 14th chapter of Romans lays down principles whereby differences of opinion are to be handled in the congregation.[553]

CONCLUSION

> 3259. יָעַד ***yāʿaḏ*:** A verb meaning to appoint, to summon, to engage, to agree, to assemble. It also means allotted or appointed time, such as the amount of time David appointed to Amasa [ă-māʾsá] to assemble the men of Judah (2 Sam. 20:5). This word can also take the meaning of appointing or designating someone to be married (Ex. 21:8, 9). Another meaning is to meet someone at an appointed time. **Amos asked the question, <u>How can two walk together unless they appoint a time at which to meet?</u>** (Amos 3:3)?[554]

This chapter is an effort toward making an appointment for God's children to meet together and to walk together. This in-depth study is not to question the integrity of those who cite Amos 3:3 to maintain their separation from other believers, but rather to try to encourage Christians to go back to the "drawing-board" in order to reexamine the traditions that are so entrenched in the mindset of so many godly men and women. The words of **Jaroslav Pelikan** (1923-2006), leading scholar on the history of Christianity and medieval intellectual history, are to the point:

> Like any growth, development may be healthy or it may be malignant, discerning the difference between these two kinds of growth requires constant research into the pathology of traditions. But it is healthy development that keeps a tradition both out of the cancer ward and out of the fossil museum.[555]

In the nineteenth century, **Friedrich Schleiermacher** (1768-1834), German theologian and philosopher, originated the idea of the hermeneutic circle. The hermeneutic circle philosophy simply means: "**Each part of a text must be interpreted with reference to the whole; yet the meaning of the whole cannot be grasped without considering the parts**."[556] Interpretation is an attempt to understand the work as a whole by an analysis of its elements.[557] Hermeneutics[558] ordinarily covers the whole field of interpretation, including exegesis. Nevertheless, hermeneutics is often used in a much narrower sense to grasp the relevance of ancient works. In other words, it is concerned about the "here" and the "now."

Having said this, we must never forget that the meaning of a text is the author's meaning. We must reject the traditional interpretation of Amos 3:3 not because it is private but because it is wrong. When we abandon the original author, when we usurp his place, this leads to confusion on the part of the interpreter. The

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[553]Ibid.

[554] Warren Baker and Eugene E. Carpenter, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2003), 455.

[555]Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 60.

[556]Kathleen Morner and Ralph Rausch, "Hermeneutics," *NTC's Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Illinois: NTC Publishing Group, 1991), 97.

[557]Ibid.

[558]See Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 17, where Stein writes: "The term 'hermeneutics,' ... Simply describes the practice or discipline of interpretation." See also Thomas H. Olbright, *Hearing God's Voice* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1996), 185, where he says, "In a large sense, hermeneutics constitutes a theory about how one person explains or communicates a text to another."

author of a text is the determiner of the meaning of his text, not the reader. When we abandon the author, this act "leads an afterlife of its own, totally cut off from the life of its author."[559]

Amos considers his preaching to be the call of God. Since God calls him, he could not refuse to warn Israel of impending destruction through a series of rhetorical questions, questions that all know the answers to. Amos concludes his cause-and-effect arguments by proclaiming the inevitable judgment of God: "Surely the Lord GOD does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets.[8] The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord GOD has spoken; who can but prophesy?" (Amos 3:7-8). To state more clearly, Amos considers his call as an appointment with God. Just as we are not likely to see two men or women walking together without having previously made arrangements to meet, so, Amos argues that he was there as a result of an appointment with God: "Do two walk together unless they have made an appointment?" (3:3). We must not allow tradition to deaden our minds with strange ideas and ready-made opinions.

We must be open for discussion. Controversy takes for granted that everyone has had experiences which may contribute something of value to the group. Dialogue perceives that we do not grasp the whole truth, but we search, track, and find some part of it. We must not shut the door on this verse (3:3). We must keep the door of dialogue open. What is dialogue? Dialogue, in a nutshell, is seeking truth. **Thomas Aquinas** (1225-1274), philosopher and theologian, a man acquainted with dialogue, said, "An angel perceives the truth by simple apprehension, whereas man becomes acquainted with a simple truth by a process from manifold data."[560]

A monopoly (exclusive possession or control) of study has no place in dialogue. Ideas must be thrown back-and-forth. There is give-and-take for every believer. **John Heron** is correct to affirm: "Facts are worse than useless unless they are accurate. Inaccuracy does not necessarily mean deceitfulness, but may take the form of not being particular to be exact."[561] Again, he aptly stresses the comparison of views: "It is by comparison of views that we reason our way toward truth. We increase the odds of finding the best solution to a problem by considering alternatives."[562]

Our interpretation of a passage of Scripture must be based upon the historical context. What are the facts presented by the author? **Christians should be able to share their understanding of the facts, right or wrong, as they understand, without fear of being "hacked to death" with a verbal sword.** If not hacked to death, at least we must suffer the dread of excommunication, all in the name of Christ. In conclusion, the following quote from Walter Rauschenbush (1861-1834), American reformer and influential in the evolution of Higher Criticism, calls attention to the precariousness of every Bible student:

> **We see in the Bible what we have been taught to see there**. We drop out great sets of facts from our field of vision. We read other things into the Bible which are not there. . . . If the Bible was not a living power before the Reformation, it was not because the Bible was chained up and forbidden, as we are told, but because **their minds were chained by preconceived ideas**, and when they read, they failed to read.[563] (Emphasis mine—bold)

The next chapter (21) explores one of the most volatile verses in all of Scripture. The word *heretick* (KJV) sends chills up-and-down the spine. This English word takes us back to the days of the Inquisition during the time of the Reformation movement. **The word *heresy* has become synonymous with teaching so-called error. For one to depart from the traditions of the church fathers calls forth the horrid term *heretic***. Chapter 21 sets forth the concept that the Greek word simply denotes a "divisive person," which has nothing to do with the rightness or wrongness of a particular belief. It has to do with an attitude of the mind—a divisive person.

The next chapter (21) highlights another Scripture that is frequently cited against other believers who are outside of one's own meticulous splinter-group. The word *heretic* is generally employed against anyone who dares to differ with the *status quo* (things as they were before the change). The word *heresy* is generally

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[559] E. D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967), 1.
[560]Quoted in John Heron, "Time to Talk Things Over," *The Royal Bank of Canada Monthly Letter* 50 (August 1969): 3.
[561]Ibid.
[562]Ibid.
[563]Walter Rauschenbush, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* (London: Macmillan Co., 1912), 45.

associated with wrong beliefs. Yet, Paul's employment of the word in the Epistle to Titus is associated with an attitude of the heart more than doctrinal correctness of the mind.

21

Who Are the Heretics?

A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; [11] Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself. (Titus 3:10-11, KJV)

Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him. [11] You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned. (Titus 3:10-11, NIV)

The word *heretic* sends chills up-and-down the spine. We cannot hear the word *heretic* without the negative overtone of someone who is not sound in the faith. Hundreds of people were executed by the Catholic Church as well as the Church of England for differences in their responses to the various ecclesiastical institutions under the charge of heresy.[564] Today, this word is frequently employed by many well-meaning Christians to castigate anyone who dares to differ with the status quo of their particular brand of orthodoxy. This study seeks to set forth the biblical concept of a "heretic." This study reveals that a biblical heretic is a factious person (**αἱρετικὸν ἄνθρωπον**, *hairetikon anthrōpon*, "a factious man/person"), not necessarily one who has misunderstood some Scripture. Too many Christians are intoxicated by their own traditions to see clearly the teachings of God. It is in this vein that Eden and Cedar Paul seek to capture the negative overtones in the word *heretics* as they relate Castellio's controversy with Calvin:

> Castellio developed his thesis with dispassionate logic, lucidly and irrefutably. The question at issue was whether heretics should be persecuted and punished with death for what was a purely intellectual offence. But before discussing this, Castellio [1515-1563] inquires: "What do we really mean by the term heretic? Whom are we entitled to call a heretic, without being unjust?" Castellio's answer runs: "I do not believe that all those who are termed heretics are really heretics. . . . The appellation has today become so abusive, so terrifying, carries with it such an atmosphere of opprobrium [something that brings disgrace], that whenever a man wishes to rid himself of a private enemy, he finds that the most convenient way is to accuse this foe of heresy. As soon as others hear the dreaded name, they are filled with such overwhelming fear that they stop their ears, and blindly assail not only the alleged heretic, but also those who venture to say a word in his favor."[565]

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[564]For a detailed account of the atrocities committed against Christians within the Church of England and the Catholic Church, see Dallas Burdette, "Where the Scriptures Speak," in Dallas Burdette, *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2008), 87-149

[565]Stefan Zweig, *The Right to Heresy: Castellio against Calvin*, translated by Eden and Cedar Paul (New York: The Viking Press, 1936), 153-154. Sebastian Castellio died on December 29, 1563 before the claws of his enemies could execute him. His death (age 48) put an end to the campaign of calumny (Ibid., 218). Eden and Cedar write, 219:

> There was not a fragment of silverware left in the house. His friends had to provide funeral expenses, pay his trifling debts, and take charge of his children. As if in recompense for the shamefulness of the accusation of heresy, Sebastian Castellio's interment was a moral triumph. Those who had timidly drawn away from him after the charge of heresy had been brought were now eager to show how much they loved and honored him. The funeral train was followed by all the members of the university, the coffin being borne to the cathedral on the shoulders of students, and interred there in the crypt. At their own cost, three hundred of his pupils provided a tombstone on which were chiseled the words: "To our renowned teacher, in gratitude for his extensive knowledge and in commemoration of the purity of his life."

Titus 3:10 is frequently cited by many well-meaning Christians to justify separation from other Christians over controversial interpretations of certain Scriptures. This passage is wrenched from its context to condone the charge of *heresy* against anyone who departs from the so-called watchword of the church fathers. The word *heresy* is frequently associated with wrong beliefs. For instance, if we believe that it is appropriate to praise God with instrumental music, then we are guilty of heresy, at least to the acappella fellowship. If we maintain that individual communion cups for the communion are correct, then the one-cup Christians label the cups users as *heretics*. Why? Because they supposedly are guilty of "false doctrine." This list of violations among the various segments within the Churches of Christ is almost *ad infinitum* (without end).

Depending on which group of saints we meet with, we discover an infringement on their so-called "new law" about public worship is sufficient to receive the label of "heretic." In order for us to be labeled as heretics, we must violate or change the traditional interpretation, that is to say, our interpretation that contradicts the dictates of the group to which we are attached. It is not uncommon for Christians to fail to consult the historical circumstances surrounding the books of the Bible under consideration. Many approach the Word of God that is colored by their environment. They borrow hand-me-down traditions received from their predecessors.

Unfortunately, many of these men and women made use of their sources to convey their particular brand of Christianity. Without thinking, they read into the texts the views that they liked best. Just a perusal of many religious journals reveals that forced and artificial methods of interpretation are piled upon the text. In other words, many believers assign meanings to words that do not belong. Many Christian communities have been transformed into totalitarianism without realizing what has happened to them. We must retrace our steps to find out where we went off the track. **As we seek to eliminate all the underbrush that hides the true meaning of Titus 3:10, we must abandon our fertile imaginations as to what we think the text means by what it says**. The word that creates confusion within the Christian community is the word *heretic*.

The words *heresy* (**αἵρεσις** *hairesis*) and *heretic* (**αἱρετικός** *hairetikos*) are two words that are frequently applied to those who maintain unorthodox teaching, that is to say, teachings not in line with the status quo of certain fellowships. Christians are frequently called *heretics* and charged with *heresy* when they do not subscribe to the tenets of a particular party. Even though we may be true to the Gospel (Jesus as God's way of salvation), still, in spite of our adherence to the Good News of God's redemption "in" and "through" Christ, unless we hold to the "odd" interpretations of a specific fellowship, then we are still castigated as *heretics*. We may believe in God, we may believe in the Deity of Jesus, we may believe in the Holy Spirit, we may believe in the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures, and we may believe that God's Word is applicable to every area of our lives, still it is not uncommon for some believers to refer to other believers as *heretics* or charge them with *heresy* when their beliefs differ from the status quo of an exacting faction.

THOMAS B. WARREN

I (Dallas Burdette), in my early ministry, applied Titus 3:10 to any fellowship of believers that refused to interpret the Scriptures in harmony with the religious leaders of the one-cup and non-Sunday school fellowship, but this Scripture is not the property of anyone group of God's people. This Scripture is cited by many fellowships to justify detachment from others when Scripture interpretation departs from the norm of a particular group. Today (2020), for one to express a view that fails to agree with another point of view as advanced by some demanding body of believers, this deviation, or variation, is sufficient to deserve the epithet of *heresy*. Since I came out of the background of Churches of Christ, I can speak from first-hand knowledge of this movement—a movement that started out as a unity movement to unite Christians in all the various denominations.

Today, there are approximately twenty-five or more divisions within the Churches of Christ. Each splinter group claims this passage as its own. For instance, the late Thomas B. Warren's (1920-2000) quotation of this passage is a classic example of the misuse of Titus 3:10 to justify departure from the so-called erring

Christian.[566] According to Warren's view, if one espouses what Warren considers to be "false doctrine," then this person is a *heretic*:

> To be a heretic is to be an espouser and follower of false doctrine. The man who persists in the promulgation of false doctrine—even in the face of efforts to persuade him to repent—must be rejected (refused). Thus, we conclude from the passage: (2) It is possible to be a heretic; (b) Such people should be admonished by faithful brethren; (c) When a heretic will not repent, he must be rejected (refused, withdrawn from) by faithful brethren.[567]

Warren speaks of "faithful brethren." This expression, to Warren, meant conformity to the dictates of his particular brand of Christianity. We must not question his sincerity in his application of Titus 3:10, but his subjective interpretation and dogmatic approach to this passage undermines and denies the very Scriptures he wanted to uphold. In fact, this Scripture, as cited by many godly men and women, would be more applicable to them than to someone else who has misinterpreted some passage of Scripture. In other words, **the word *heretic* has to do with an attitude of the heart more than doctrinal correctness of the mind**. To the unsuspecting, there appears to be truth to his explanation. For example, we can agree that if one is a *heretic*, then he or she must be refused. These individuals—men or women—must be admonished by other Christians to desist in their behavior of factiousness. And, finally, this one must be shunned if he or she continues in this kind of unethical behavior that is disruptive to the unity of the Spirit. Paul also dealt with this kind of behavior in Romans 16:17.[568]

We can also grant this analysis that one who is a biblical heretic must be shunned if they continue in the behavior that Paul addresses, but, on the other hand, we cannot see eye-to-eye with Warren when he says, "To be a heretic is to be an espouser and follower of false doctrine." He is employing a definition that is anachronistic (existing or happening outside its historical order). The implications that he draws from Titus 3:10 are not necessarily true.

His essay is based on a series of unverifiable arguments, which in turn function as assumptions, that is, to the effect that the Apostle Paul had Warren's philosophy in mind when he wrote to Titus. I have not hesitated to reject ancient doctrines when new evidence demonstrates that the traditional interpretation is untenable. I, too, was taught many interpretations by a godly and sincere man of God, but, at the same time, he failed to look at the context in many of his citations from Holy Scripture. Unconsciously, he wrenched Scriptures out of context through piece-meal interpretation. It is time for us to reexamine old texts through new eyes.

It appears, so it seems to me, that Warren's rationalization is similar in nature to the position maintained by Catholic and Anglican Churches during the 14th through the 18th centuries as well as the Spanish Inquisition. The believers in these movements inflicted torture beyond belief over the misunderstanding of the words heresy and *heretic.* Twenty-first century Christians cannot burn individuals at the stake or drown them in rivers, but, nevertheless, they can still infuse stark terror in the hearts of many with the word *excommunicate*. The explanation that Warren assigns to Titus 3:10 is the description that is generally doled out to the words *heresy* and *heretic.* The *Webster's University Dictionary* defines these two words as:

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[566]Even though Thomas B. Warren (1920-2000) has gone on to be with the Lord, nevertheless his writings still remain. Since he is still respected as a scholar, it is necessary to scrutinize his writings to see if he followed the context in his application of certain passages in seeking to give validity to his actions of separation from other believers who could not concur with him in his interpretation of many Scriptures. He, like all of us, brings a certain amount of baggage to the Scriptures, which is inevitable. Still, we have to be conscious of our own presuppositions. My remarks about his essay have nothing to do with my respect for this man whose life was dedicated to Jesus Christ. In my opinion, he mistakenly misapplied certain Scriptures to uphold his exclusivist concept of fellowship. I, too, did this for many years. So, I can sympathize with his struggles in wanting to be true to the Word of God. My analysis of his application of Titus 3:10 is not to condemn, but rather to help bring about a better understanding of the Holy Scriptures in order that the unity for which Jesus prayed might become a reality among His people, even if my comments about his application of Titus 3:10 seem rather blunt at times.

[567]Thomas B. Warren, "We Must Honor God's Law of Exclusion" (Editorial), *The Spiritual Sword* 12, no. 4 (July 1981): 22. Since the writing of this essay, Warren has crossed the great gulf to be with the Lord.

[568] For a more detailed study of Romans 16:17, see Chapter 14 ("Watch Out for Those Who Cause Divisions") in this book, pp. 273-304.

Heresy. **1a**. An opinion or doctrine in conflict with established religious beliefs, esp. dissension from or denial of Roman Catholic dogma by a professed believer or baptized church member. **b.** Adherence to such dissenting opinions or doctrine. **2a.** An unorthodox or controversial opinion or doctrine, as in philosophy, science, or politics. **b.** Adherence to such unorthodox or controversial opinion.[569]

Heretic. 1. One who hold or advocates controversial opinions, esp. one who publicly opposes the officially accepted dogma of the Roman Catholic Church.[570]

It is not uncommon for Christians within the various splinter groups of the Churches of Christ to refuse fellowship with other believers when they decline to adhere to an opinion that is officially accepted as dogma with a particular group. The reason for the negative response is based upon the label *heretic*, which he or she must be accused of in order to preserve the prevailing attitude of the defenders of the faith. Thus, the term *heretic* is indiscriminately associated with the horrible word *heresy*, which, as stated above, brings to mind the *heresy* trials of the Spanish Inquisition. John R. W. Stott (1921-2011), evangelical Anglican, preacher and teacher of Scripture, is quite correct in observing that the traditional interpretation is anachronistic:

Warn a *divisive* person, Paul writes. The Greek word is *hairetikos*, which the AV and (surprisingly NEB translate "heretic'. But his is an anachronism, for the word had not yet assumed this meaning. *Hairesis* means a sect, party or school of thought, and is applied in the Acts to Sadducees, Pharisees and Christians. *Hairetikos*, however, meant somebody who is 'factious' (RSV), 'contentious' (REB) or 'divisive' (NIV).[571]

ALLEN BAILEY: SON OF THE LATE ALTON BAILEY

Another sincere writer and preacher, Allen Bailey (second cousin of mine), of the one-cup and non-Sunday school persuasion, cites this verse as well as many other passages in his essay against so-called false teachers. Just a cursory glance at his many citations reveals that he would consider Thomas B. Warren a *heretic*, that is, one guilty of *heresy*.[572] We almost stand in disbelief as we encounter the many individuals whom he labels as false teachers in his study. The definition that Warren and Bailey assign to these words through their writings does not come from the Bible, but rather from the traditions of men. In this lengthy study by Bailey, he cites twenty-eight Scriptures to give validity to his castigation of men who do not concur with his particular brand of orthodoxy. In this numerous accumulation of Scripture references, he also quotes Titus 3:10.

In his essay, he has a subtitle—False Doctrines of the Twentieth Century—which takes in the "Promise-Keepers Movement,"[573] "Catholic Evangelical Accord,"[574] "Calvinism,"[575] "Grace-Faith-Works Issue,"[576]

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[569]Webster's *II New Riverside University Dictionary*, 1984 ed., s. v. "heresy."

[570]Ibid., s.v. "heretic."

[571]John R. W. Stott (1921-2011), *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 210.

[572]Allen Bailey, "Beware of False Teachers," Preachers' *Study Notes: 1994 Preachers' Study* (Buffalo, Missouri: Christian's Expositor Publications, 1996), 69-82. As stated above concerning Thomas B. Warren and Allen Bailey, both men wish to be true to the Word of God. Having said this, Bailey received his interpretation of Titus 3:10 from two men—E.H. Miller (1909-1989) his grandfather and my uncle) and his father and my first cousin (Alton Bailey. Both Alton and I received our training and understanding from E. H. Miller [1909-1989] (my uncle and Alton Bailey's father-in-law). The three of us—myself, Alton (1932-2014), and Allen—grew up in a fellowship in which grace was not discussed. It is significant that Allen calls attention to this neglect in his childhood and early ministry. Allen Bailey, to express in his own words this poverty of grace in preaching, says,

Brothers, sisters, and friends, please listen. I do have some concerns and sympathy toward the confusion on this problem. By and large we have all been raised with law-law-law and little or no grace taught. I was raised in a congregation [Murphy Ave. Church of Christ, LaGrange, GA.] with three full length gospel meetings every year. I don't remember preachers preaching the subject of grace. I worked closely with several congregations in Missouri, and though I attended their meetings for thirteen years, I cannot remember one lesson given on grace. I have been preaching for nineteen years and have just recently began to teach on Grace. We must remember that to preach grace is to preach Jesus Christ for "grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (Jn. 1:17) [Ibid., 78,79].

[573]Ibid., 75.

"Liberal Views on Fellowship,"[577] "The Truth About the Church of Christ—Hugh F. Pyle," [578] "Televangelists (T. V. Evangelist Pat Robertson (b. 1930) and the 700 club, Oral Roberts (1918-2009), Jim Baker, Jimmy Swaggart, Robert Tilton (b. 1946), etc.),"[579] "Pastor Pet Peters,"[580] "John McArthur,"[581] "J. Vernon McGee (1904-1988)," [582] and on and on he goes. Titus 3:10 is just one of twenty-eight Scriptures he cites to give soundness to his charge of "False Teachers." He writes: "To this concern, and all others, I sound the alarm—*beware of false teachers*!"[583]

Under the umbrella of Titus 3:10, he includes those within the Churches of Christ who seek a wider fellowship with other believers; anyone who is willing to cross the dictates of a few self-appointed watchdogs for the orthodoxy of a small segment of God's people. And furthermore, he brings in those who teach that salvation is by faith in Jesus, not works. We must take for granted, even though Titus 3:10 does not employ the words "false teachers," that Bailey considers the word *heretic* as synonymous with "false teachers," which in turn is identified as "false teaching."

This particular Scripture is cited to condemn Christians, such as the late Warren who used individual communion cups and participated in Sunday school. This philosophy about Titus 3:10 and its application are not new with Bailey. He cut, as it were, his eyeteeth on this passage. I, too, also cut my eyeteeth on this passage. I, as well, misapplied this Scripture for over seventeen years of my ministry. His misunderstanding and my misunderstanding was/is not rebellion against the teachings of Holy Scripture, but rather, it was/is simply an honest mistake of the heart.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit did not employ the traditional meaning generally assigned to this word *heretic*. In the New Testament, the word *heresy* does not suggest truth or error—good or bad. The English word *heresy* is anglicized from the Greek **αἵρεσις**, *hairesis*. E. P. Gould puts it graphically:

> "Heresies" is a transliteration, but not a translation, of the Greek word, which has come over into the English with a different meaning from its ordinary Greek, or New Testament, meaning.[584]

The Greek expression **αἵρεσις** (*hairesis*) did not originally denote anything good or bad; but rather, the word simply meant "choice" or "the act of choosing." The Septuagint (LXX) uses *hairesis* to refer to the gift that one chooses to offer to God (Leviticus 22:18). Also, Moses employs *hairesis* to describe the choice of Simeon and Levi (Genesis 49:5). We quickly observe that in the LXX, the word may relate to choices, which may be good or bad. Both Paul and Peter employ this word as Partyism (1 Corinthians 11:19; Galatians 5:20; 2 Peter 2:1; Titus 3:10).

God condemns this kind of attitude—a stance of divisiveness, or factiousness. Luke also uses this same word but not in a bad sense. For instance, he writes, "Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party (**αἵρεσις** *hairesis*) of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy" (Acts 5:17). Later, Luke gives a brief overview of Paul's trial before Felix in which the word *hairesis* is employed. At this trial, Tertullus, a lawyer, brought charges against Paul with the following words: "We have found this man to be a

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[574]Ibid., 77.
[575]Ibid.
[576]Ibid., 78
[577]Ibid., 79.
[578]Ibid., 80.
[579]Ibid.
[580]Ibid.
[581]Ibid.
[582]Ibid.
[583]Ibid., 81
[584]E. P. Gould, *First Corinthians*, in *An American Commentary on the New Testament*, vol., 5 ed., Alvah Hovey, Reprint Edition , nd (Philadelphia: The American Baptist Publication, 1887), 97.

troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect (**αἱρέσεως** *haireseōs*)" [24:5].

At a glance, it might appear that the "Nazarene sect" is used in a bad sense, but the derogatory remarks by Tertullus are not against the sect, as such, but against Paul as a "ringleader" of the Nazarene sect. Paul's response to the accusation is an argument that he is loyal to the Jewish religion:

> My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone at the temple, or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere else in the city. [13]And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me. [14] However, I admit that I worship the God of our fathers as a follower of the Way, which they call a sect (**αἵρεσιν** *hairesin*). I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets. (24:12-14)

Again, Luke records Paul's arrival at Rome and his request to meet with the leaders of the Jews. In the course of the conversation, they informed Paul that they had not heard anything bad about him. The leaders then informed Paul that they wanted to know his views concerning the sect (**αἱρέσεως** *hairesin*) that so many were talking against (28:17-22). Paul considered himself a loyal and orthodox Jew until his dying day. Yes, Christians today are members of the "Nazarene sect," but, at the same time, God condemns sects within THE SECT.

The Scriptures give no indication that the word *hairesis* has anything to do with opinions or doctrines, whether true or false. We can be guilty of *hairesis* even with the truth (see Romans 16:17). The word simply means sect or party, whether good or bad, or indifferent. Within Judaism, there were several sects, but with Christianity there are parts but not parties (see 1 Corinthians 3:1-23). Within the Christian community, every believer is to make every effort to protect the "unity of the Spirit." Listen to Paul as he makes his plea for harmony within the body of Christ:

> As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. [2]Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. [3] Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. [4] There is one body and one Spirit— just as you were called to one hope when you were called—[5] one Lord, one faith, one baptism; [6] one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. [7] But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. (Ephesians 4:1-7)

Every sect within the Nazarene sect must surrender its opinions as a bond of union. If we surrender our opinions, what remains to unite Christians? The answer is found in the Gospel facts alone. Paul builds his case for maintaining the unity of the Spirit upon seven "ones" (4:1-7). These facts alone can unite Christians. It goes, almost with saying, that "the faith" is public property, but, on the other hand, opinions are private property. The Scriptures declare that there is "one faith" (Jesus is the object of this one faith), but nowhere does it state there is "one opinion." Alexander Campbell (1788-1866), early leader in the Second Great Awakening of the religious movement that has been referred to as the Restoration Movement within the Churches of Christ, captures the very essence of Paul's admonition to Titus with the following succinct words:

> I will now show how they cannot make a sect of us. We will acknowledge all as Christians who acknowledge the gospel facts, and obey Jesus Christ. . . . If he will dogmatize and become a factionist, we reject him—not because of his opinions, but because of his attempting to make a faction, or to lord it over God's heritage.[585]

THE HERETIC AND THE FALSE TEACHER

The word *heretic* (**αἱρετικός**, *hairetikos*) appears but once in the New Testament (Titus 3:10). The NIV translates this verse: "Warn a divisive person (**αἱρετικόν ἄνθρωπον**, *hairetikon anthrōpon*) once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him." The NASB translates this verse as: "Reject a factious man after a first and second warning"[586] The NCV renders this passage: "After a first and second

[585]Alexander Campbell, *Christianity Restored* (Rosemead, California: Old Paths Book Club, 1959), 122, 123.
[586]*The New American Standard Bible, 1995 Update*, (La Habra, California: The Lockman Foundation) 1996.

warning, avoid someone who causes arguments."[587] This person of whom Paul speaks is an individual who is the head of a faction. He or she is the promoter of a sect or party within the body of Christ, which is one. Paul is saying that the *heretic* is one who has decided that he or she is right and everyone else is wrong to the point of creating division over his or her opinion or opinions. The following extract from William Barclay (1907-1978), Church of Scotland minister and Professor of Divinity and Biblical Criticism at the University of Glasgow, may help to explain the original meaning of the word *heretic:*

> The English word heresy is to all intents and purposes a transliteration of the Greek word *Hairesis*. In English, heresy is a word with a distinctively bad meaning; it denotes a belief which is contrary to orthodoxy and to true doctrine. But in Greek *Hairesis* is not necessarily a bad word for it means either an act of choosing or a choice.... It is the breaking up of the unity of the Church into cliques who shut their circle to all but their own number.... There is all the difference in the world between believing that we are right and believing that everyone else is wrong. Unshakable conviction is a Christian virtue; unyielding intolerance is a sin.[588]

We may be correct in our interpretation of the Scriptures and still be a *heretic* in the biblical sense of the word. The Christians at Rome—whether weak or strong—were encouraged to allow for discrepancies of opinions concerning the eating of meats and the keeping of certain days. He went right to the very heart of the spirit of intolerance in seeking to maintain the unity created by the Holy Spirit. For instance, Paul began his analysis of diversity existing among the members of the Christians at Rome with a startling statement: "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters" (Romans 14:1). Then Paul succinctly asked: "Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand" (14:4). Following his discussion of variations within the body of believers at Rome, he issues the following orders: "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (15:7). In other words, Christ had accepted all of them with imperfection in their lives and in their knowledge.

Thus, Paul is saying that they should accept one another in the same fashion that Christ accepts them—"warts and all." Even though some were mistaken in their knowledge, still they were not accused of *heresy*. If on the other hand, the "knowing ones" persisted in destroying the unity of the body of Christ in order to enforce unity-in-conformity, then Paul would have called them *heretics*. Paul, in concluding this epistle (Romans), issues a warning toward those who were not willing to make allowances for irregularity in discernment of God's Word: "I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them" (16:17).

What had they learned? We should reread Chapters 14 and 15 of the Book of Romans to understand what they had learned. These two chapters deal with the spirit of toleration in spite of differences in opinions. For those not willing to exercise patience with those who understood things differently, Paul says that one should keep an eye on those who insist that it is my way or no way. This mental mindset is what Paul confronts in his letter to Titus. The context of Titus 3 reveals that Paul is dealing with individuals who insist that it is my way or no way at all.

Paul, too, had to confront the same mental attitude in Corinth concerning imperfection in understanding the true nature of the Godhead. Paul writes six chapters (8-13) dealing with dissimilarity within the congregation. He begins Chapter 8 with words that may possibly have been upon the lips of some of the believers: "Now about food sacrificed to idols: **We know that we all possess knowledge**" (1 Corinthians 8:1). Once more, William Barclay (1907-1978) uses the following pregnant words in his comments on this passage:

> Nothing ought to be judged solely from the point of view of knowledge; everything ought to be judged from the point of view of love. The argument of the advanced Corinthians was that they knew better than to regard an idol as anything; their knowledge had taken them far past that. There is always a certain danger in knowledge. It tends to make a man arrogant and feel superior and look down unsympathetically on the man who is not as far advanced as himself. Knowledge which does that is not true knowledge. But the consciousness of intellectual superiority is a dangerous thing.

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[587] *The New Century Version*, (Dallas, Texas: Word Publishing) 1987, 1988, 1991.

[588] William Barclay, *Flesh and Spirit* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), 58, 59, 60.

> Our conduct should always be guided not by the thought of our own superior knowledge, but by sympathetic and considerate love for our fellow man. And it may well be that for his sake we must refrain from doing and saying certain otherwise legitimate things.[589]

Paul calls attention to the arrogance of so-called intellectual superiority by a few: "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. [2] **The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know** (8:1b-2). How does God react toward the man or woman who loves Him, but still does not get the picture fully? Is God like a motorcycle cop riding around waiting for the least infraction of the law in order to zap him or her? How should we react to imperfection in knowledge? How many Christians comprehend the teachings of God as they ought? Paul says that the person who thinks he or she has a handle on everything is just barking up the wrong tree.

Again, how does God feel about someone who is lacking in "picture perfect" information? Are there any mitigating circumstances in which God makes allowances? Listen to Paul as he nips the arguments of the "knowing ones" in the bud: "But the man who loves God is known by God" (8:3). This is one of the greatest statements in all of Scripture. **If a man loves God**, says Paul, **God knows this man**. This statement goes against the grain of the present day philosophy of "unity-in-conformity." Paul advances the notion of "unity-in-diversity" in First Corinthians, Romans, and Titus.

Paul correctly says through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, "There is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live" (8:6). Yes, there is "one God" and "one Lord." But did everyone appreciate this truth? Listen to Paul once more: "But not everyone knows this" (8:7). Were these folks still Christians and in fellowship with God and Christ? Again, Paul gives the proper response as to how Christians should treat one another over this controversial issue that threatens to divide the unity of the Spirit:

> Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. [10] For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol's temple, won't he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? [11]So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. (8:9-11)

Earlier, in this chapter, attention was called to six chapters in First Corinthians in which Paul dealt with diversity within the Corinthian congregation. After developing his thoughts, we observe the master builder reaching the climax of his literary masterpiece of unity within the body of Christ. He does this in the thirteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians. This chapter is generally disconnected and isolated from its context of concreteness and interpreted with abstraction—nothing to really sink the teeth into. How does Paul deal with this imperfection in knowledge? The answer is love. The same response that he set forth in Chapter 8: "The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. [3] **But the man who loves God is known by God**" (vv. 2-3). Yet again, one should observe verse two again: "The man who thinks he knows something **does not yet know as he ought to know**." Now, pay attention to Paul as he concludes his analysis of discrepancies within the fellowship:

> Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. [13] And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love. (13:12-13)

How do we deal faithfully with this subject of "Who Are the Heretics?" without repeating the same themes time and again? Repetition is sometimes necessary in order to cause individuals to reread the text anew. Again, we should reexamine old texts through new eyes. The task of discarding the underbrush of traditions heaped upon Titus 3:10 is a monumental undertaking. We should remember that repetition is a good teacher. In

[589]William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians*, The Daily Study Bible Series, Revised Edition (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1975), 76.

the early 70s, my Greek and Hebrew professor (Lawrence Barclay) taught that there are three laws to learning: (1) repetition, (2) repetition, and (3) repetition.

The biblical *heretic* is the man or woman who has a sectarian spirit. Many devout and sincere Christians within the Churches of Christ as well as other denominational bodies have failed to consider the context of Titus 3:10 and the "common sense" interpretation of the real world, not in the fantasy world. Even though we may argue that "common sense" is not a good guide in the interpretation of Scripture, still, if something goes against the grain ("common sense"), then we ought to reexamine our own presuppositions to see if they are in harmony with the Word of God. If something does not have a "ring of truth," we should at least go back to the drawing board to reexamine our preconceived notions.

An illustration of "common sense interpretation" is found in the writings of Carl Ketcherside (1908-1989), preacher and author: "Men can be mistaken without being malicious. They can fail to understand without falling away from Jesus."[590] For a second time, no one has expressed the danger of the party spirit with its desire to hold back growth in knowledge better than Ketcherside: "Every faction seeks to freeze knowledge at an arbitrary partisan level, and every such faction does it by skimming off the brains."[591] One more example of "common sense interpretation" from Ketcherside should suffice to nail the coffin shut on those who wish to make conformity the criterion by which fellowship is extended to believers:

> Those who were in Christ in the days of the apostles were in error on many points. They were mistaken about a lot of things but they were not charged with "preaching another gospel." Freedom from error is not a condition of salvation else all men would be damned. We are not saved by attainment to a certain degree of knowledge but by faith in Christ Jesus. It is by belief of facts related to him, and not by grasp of abstract truth, that we are justified before God. Certainly it is not by performance of meritorious deeds nor by legalistic conformity. When we postulate a program of justification by knowledge we hang ourselves on the gallows we have constructed to rid ourselves of others, unless we are prepared to make ourselves even more ridiculous by affirming that we know as much as God.[592]

One of the founders of the fellowship known as the Churches of Christ addresses this issue of various levels of knowledge in trying to correct the sectarian spirit in his own day. The Churches of Christ are notorious for using the word *denomination* to refer to other religious bodies, but, at the same time, they exclude themselves as if they, and they alone, belong to the "true" church, which is not a denomination.[593]Alexander Campbell (1788-1866) paints a picture with words that captures "common sense interpretation," mentioned earlier, in describing the deplorable conditions of disunity within the Christian community. The Christians in his day were just as divided over issues as the Churches of Christ are today. Listen to Campbell's timely words of warning:

> Amongst Christians there is now, as there was at the beginning a very great diversity in the knowledge of the Christian institution. There are babes, children, young men, and fathers in Christ now, as well as in the days of the Apostle John.

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[590]Carl Ketcherside, "Analysis of Apostasy," *Mission Messenger* 27, no., 5 (April 1965): 51.

[591]Carl Ketcherside, "Gospel and Doctrine," *Mission Messenger* 27, no., 2 (February 1965): 18.

[592]Carl Ketcherside, "Another Gospel," *Mission Messenger* 27, no 1 (January 1965): 6-7.

[593]This statement, no doubt, sends chills up-and-down the spines of many Christians. Yet, one of the founders of the movement known as the Churches of Christ was honest enough to refer to this movement as a denomination. Keep your mind on Campbell as he explains his movement:

> Whenever the history of this effort at reformation shall have been faithfully written, it will appear, we think, bright as the sun, that our career has been marked with a spirit of forbearance, moderation, and love of union with an unequivocal desire for preserving the integrity, harmony, and co-operation of all who teach one faith, one Lord, and one immersion. In confirmation of this fact I am happy to add that no Baptist of good character for piety and morality, has ever been, because of a diverse theory or opinion, excluded from our communion or communities.... We, as a **denomination,** are as desirous as ever to unite and co-operate with all Christians on the broad and vital principles of the New and everlasting Covenant [emphasis mine—RDB] (Alexander Campbell, "The Editor's Response to Mr. Broaddus," *Millennial Harbinger***,** New Series, 4, no. 12 (December 1840): 556.)

> This, from the natural gifts of God, from the diversities of age, education, and circumstances, is unavoidable. And would it not be just as rational and as scriptural to excommunicate one another, because our knowledge is less or greater than any fixed measure, as for differences of opinion or matters of speculation?
>
> Indeed, in most cases where proscription [to denounce or condemn—RDB] and exclusions now occur in this country, the excluded are the most intelligent members of the society; and although no community will accuse a man because he knows more of his Bible than his brethren, and on this account exclude him from their communion; yet this, it is manifest, rather than heresy, (of which, however, for consistency's sake, he must be accused,) is, in truth, the real cause of separation.
>
> If God has bestowed better gifts or better opportunities on one man than another, by which he has attained more knowledge, instead of thanking God for his kindness to the community, they beg God to take him away; and if he will not be so unkind, they will at length put him from among them under the charge of heresy. In most instances the greatest error of which a brother can be guilty, is to study his Bible more than his companions—or, at least, to surpass them in his knowledge of the mystery of Christ.[594]

The context of Titus 3:10 does not teach that one who fails to subscribe to certain rules and regulations that other Christians seek to impose upon him or her are guilty of *heresy*. We are not *heretics* simply because we cannot conscientiously concur with the orthodox position of a particular party. We can be mistaken without being rebellious. We can fail to understand without falling away from Jesus. Our position on the use of individual containers to distribute the fruit of the vine in the Lord's Supper, Bible classes for teaching the Word of God to different age groups, chartered homes in which to rear and care for orphans, belief in pre-millennialism, teaching that the Book of Revelation was written before June AD 68, praising God with instruments of music, and so on, does not, in and of itself, constitute *heresy* or the epithet *heretic*.[595]

No one who is honestly mistaken about some matters of scriptural interpretation is a *heretic*. For one to be a *heretic*, one must make a test of fellowship out of his or her opinions and then attempt to establish a party to promote or protect that view. The *heretic* is one who brands and stigmatizes humble seekers after truth whose character is above reproach and whose only crime is that they cannot be of the same mindset in every point of view or opinion held by those who have assumed the role of infallible interpreters. This mindset of intoleration for various viewpoints is the subject matter that Paul warns against in his Epistles—First Corinthians, Romans, and Titus.

CONCLUSION

Again, we need to reexamine this old text through new eyes. The *heretic* is one who seeks his or her own way, whether right or wrong in one's interpretation. Paul is writing to Titus who is acting as pastor for a group of believers. He is not discussing the issues that John addresses in his Epistles concerning Jesus coming in the flesh and the denial that Jesus is the Messiah (2 John 7-10; 1 John 2:22-23) nor Paul's admonition to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 5 (man having sex with his father's wife). My objective in writing this chapter is to promote unity among God's people. I do not question the integrity of the men that I have reviewed in this study. I regard them as sincere and devoted to the things of God, but, at the same time, they are misinformed as to the true intent of Titus 3:10.

We, as a Christian community, must learn to examine a text within its ***immediate*** context, its ***remote*** context, and its ***larger*** context (other Scriptures dealing with the same subject outside of the book itself). If we, as a body of believers, wish to restore unity within the various Christian fellowships within Christendom, we must stop piece-meal interpretation. Citing a Scripture verbatim is not the answer. We must seek to uncover the author's intent through the ***immediate*** (verse immediately preceding and following) and ***remote*** context (the book itself). In conclusion, a citation from Leroy Garrett (1918-2015), professor and author, captures eloquently the role of so-called *heretics* down through the centuries:

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[594] Alexander Campbell, "To Mr. William Jones, of London, Letter IV," *Millennial Harbinger* 6, no. 3 (March 1835): 112.

[595] I recommend the following essays on this subject as two of the most informative articles written on this subject: Carl Ketcherside, "What Is Heresy," *Mission Messenger* 25, no., 3 (March 1963): 39-44; Leroy Garrett, "Who Is A Heretic?" *Mission Messenger* 25, no., 3 (March 1963): 33-39.

> The roll call of heretics in the history of thought is more honorific than it is infamous. The prophets who were stoned as heretics lie buried in tombs that are garnished by later generations. The scientists who were once silenced and excommunicated for their heterodoxy are today among the heroes admired by every schoolboy who studies the history of nations. The philosophers who were once exiled and poisoned as schismatics are now among the respected names in the annals of thought.[596]

The next chapter (22) seeks to bring together the very heart of this study (*Old Texts through New* Eyes). Since Jesus prayed for unity among His people, it is incumbent upon His people to work for the unity for which He prayed. This chapter calls attention to the Christians in Corinth, the Christians in Rome, and to the various slogans that we often fail to differentiate in order to maintain the unity for which our Lord Jesus prayed (John 17).

[596]Leroy Garrett, "Who Is A Heretic?" *Mission Messenger* 25, no., 3 (March 1963): 33.

22

Unity in Jesus

> Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. And, I suppose I should add, it is traditionalism that gives tradition such a bad name. The reformers of every age, whether political or religious or literary, have protested against the tyranny of the dead, and in doing so have called for innovation and insight in place of tradition.[597]

This chapter is designed to assist elders, preachers, and members within the Christian community to become more adept in correctly handling the Word of God (2 Timothy 2:15). In order to accomplish this goal, it is my intention to share with leaders and members the tools needed to recapture the art of how to read the Bible in order to maintain the unity for which Jesus prayed in His priestly prayer (John 17:20-23). This chapter analyzes Paul's handling of differences within the congregations at Rome and Corinth.[598] This brief analysis of Unity in Jesus demonstrates that imperfection in understanding does not, in and of itself, warrant the stigma of false teacher as a result of misinterpretation. Also this investigation discusses the failure on the part of many Christians in their oversight to differentiate between certain views that have contributed to a breakdown of unity among God's people.

To illustrate the importance of the unity for which Jesus prayed, Paul is called upon to emphasize the urgency of the matter. It is in this regard that Paul pleaded with Christians at Ephesus to "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit (**τὴν ἑνότητα τοῦ πνεύματος**, *tēn henotēta tou pneumatos*, "the Spirit's unity") through the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). This unity is not created by us, but rather this unity is the Spirit's unity. We are under a mandate from the Holy Spirit to maintain His unity. This mandate is essential on the part of every believer in order to fulfill the prayer of Jesus for unity so that the world may believe. Not only did Paul plead with the Ephesians, he also encouraged the Christians in Rome to "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (Romans 15:7).

Since God accepted the Christians at Rome with imperfection in their lives and in their knowledge, then Paul called upon them to exercise the same kind of love and forbearance toward their fellow Christians for whom Christ died. Many devout Christians do not realize the purpose of Jesus' prayer because they do not discern who is or who is not a false teacher in the light of the context of Matthew's narrative. Unfortunately, many Christians latch onto the epithet "false prophets" by Jesus in Matthew's Gospel without reference to the context.[599] Jesus prayed for oneness and Paul also called for union. This exposition explores ways to bring about the fulfillment of Jesus' and Paul's prayer for singularity of purpose.

Since my personal ministry is secondarily confined within the parameters of the Churches of Christ, I feel that a part of my ministry is to help correct the abuses of God's Word handed down to us from our forefathers within the Churches of Christ. This movement (Campbell/Stone) started out as a unity movement, but soon crystallized into warring factions, each promoting its own brand of Christianity.[600] Today, we soon

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[597]Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 65.

[598]For a more detailed analysis of unity, see Dallas Burdette, "Introduction" in Dallas Burdette, *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood, FL: Xulon, 2008), xvii-xxx.

[599]See Chapter 4 for a detailed study of Book of Matthew, which study surveys the "false prophets" in light of context.

[600]See Thomas Campbell, "Declaration and Address," in C. A. Young, *Historical Documents Advocating Christian Union* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, reprint, 1985), 107, 108 where he writes in Proposition One:

discover that there are approximately twenty-five divisions within this once united movement—each claiming to be the "loyal" church.

Each group maintains that it speaks where the Bible speaks and is silent where the Bible is silent.[601] For individuals who refuse to subscribe to the orthodoxy of a particular group often receive the ominous label of "false teachers." Whenever a distinctive religious group sets forth its interpretation of a singular Scripture, then for us to disagree with that traditional exposition is tantamount to disagreeing with God Himself. In this philosophy of explanation, we do not distinguish between our critique of God's Word and the Word of God itself. If one group sets forth a perception of Scripture that does not conform to the status quo of another camp, then the "at odds" fellowship is accused of not speaking where the Bible speaks.

Unity, as a whole, among many Churches of Christ as well as other denominations is based upon conformity, not unity in diversity.[602] Numerous Christian fellowships are returning to the biblical concept of unity in diversity, and, as a result of this stance on unity in diversity by many elders, preachers, and members of the body of Christ, the unity in conformity group labels the unity in diversity fellowship as false teachers or liberal brethren.[603]

Today, the Churches of Christ are hopelessly engaged in combat. These skirmishes are based upon a faulty reading of many Scriptures that are employed as means of justification for separation from other Christians. One such Scripture is Matthew7:15: "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves."

In order to combat this loose type of explanation, it is necessary to expound upon the principles of examination to combat an illegal use of Scriptures to foster division. The Word of God provides its own environment for a proper comprehension of its teachings. This chapter accepts the presupposition that false prophets are **not necessarily** individuals who fail to make clear the Scriptures, but rather the false prophets/teachers are individuals whose ethical behavior is not in harmony with God's Law. To accomplish this target of correctly identifying the false prophets in the Gospel of Matthew, as cited above, we must learn how to read the Scriptures with understanding—especially Scriptures with narrative interpretation.

In other words, we must study in detail the context in which the phrase "false prophets" occurs, otherwise, this lack of awareness may present us with obstacles that might hinder a proper application of a healthy comprehension as to whom the phrase false prophets designates. This in-depth development of context[604] is essential for proper growth and development and unity in God's **ἐκκλησία**, (*ekklēsia,* "an assembly, a congregation, a society, a church"). To facilitate the usefulness of contextual studies, this chapter briefly explores two congregations in biblical times in which differences existed in order to help believers in Christ today to determine how Christians should react to similar circumstances in which deficiency in knowledge was prevalent.

That the Church of Christ upon earth is **essentially**, **intentionally**, and **constitutionally** one; consisting of all those in every place that profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him in all things according to the Scriptures, and that manifest the same by their tempers and conduct, and of none else; as none else can be truly and properly called Christians.

[601] See Dallas Burdette, "Where the Scriptures Speak," in *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2008), 87-152.

[602] For an example of this mindset, see Jerry Dickinson, "Unity in Diversity," *Old Paths Advocate* LXVII, no. 8 (August 1995): 1, 8-9. The one-cup, non-Sunday school, grape juice only, bread pinchers, and so on, publish this particular journal. See also Don L. King, "Proper Perspective," *Old Paths Advocate* LXVII, no. 9 (September 1995):2, 7. Billy D. Dickinson writes another insightful article that discloses the inner feelings of this peculiar fellowship, "False Teachers and Fellowship," *Old Paths Advocate* LXVIII, no. 10 (October 1995): 1, 9.

[603] See J. E. Choate (1916-2013, 97 years old), "The Baby Boomers and Unity in Diversity," *Firm Foundation* 108, no. 8 (August 1993): 18-20.

[604]In order to ascertain the meaning that is attached to any word or phrase, we must examine the context. The word "context" is from Latin, which means to "weave together" and is applied to written documents. The context is the connection of thought that runs through every passage, which constitutes for itself a whole. The immediate context is that which immediately precedes or follows a given word, phrase, or sentence. Not only must the context be considered, but we must also investigate the scope and plan of the author.

THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH

Within the Churches of Christ, the epithet "false teacher" is assigned to individuals who do not vouch to a particular interpretation of a distinctive fellowship. Correctness in doctrine, according to some, is the measurement of right standing before God. Imperfection in one's knowledge calls forth the title of false prophet or teacher. Since this study is concerned about unity in Jesus, the proper identification of false prophets in the Gospel of Matthew should help us to dispel an incorrect classification as to who is and who is not a false prophet in Matthew's Gospel.

Paul rebukes the Corinthians for not making allowances for shortcomings in understanding among some believers in the congregation. Paul calls attention in his first letter to Corinth to a wrong perception of correctness as the criterion by which one is placed in a right relationship with God.

> Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge.[a] Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. [2]The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. [3]But the man who loves God is known by God. (1 Corinthians 8:1-3)

Paul did not castigate, or criticize, those with imperfection in knowledge as false teachers/prophets. As we peruse, or read carefully, the various citations from Scripture, we immediately recognize that deformity in knowledge does not necessarily mean that one is a false teacher. In the Corinthian letter, Paul is clearly dealing with insufficient knowledge and one's relationship to God—a relationship based upon love, not upon absolute knowledge.

Paul develops in the Corinthian letter the concept that God loves the person with limited knowledge as well as the person with clear insight. With Paul, as long as one loves God—in spite of deficiency in aptitude—this person is acceptable to God. The "intent of the heart" does play an important role in deciding who is and who is not acceptable to God. Paul further demonstrates the principle of love and relationship in the following comments about idols and one's belief system:

> So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. [5]For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), [6]yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live. [7] But not everyone knows this. (8:4-7a)

THE ROMAN CHURCH

To set the stage for sounder principles of hermeneutics, a brief reflection upon Romans 14 and 15 should shed further light on how Paul reacted toward those whose knowledge was deficient. In these two chapters, Paul deals with those who wanted to make exact interpretation the criterion by which we determine our faithfulness or unfaithfulness to God. The first four verses of Chapter 14 demonstrate forcefully Paul's attitude in this matter of reception and rejection. Paul captures this spirit of patience in graphic language in this letter to Rome.

> Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters. [2]One man's faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. [3]The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. [4] Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. (Romans 14:1-4)

Paul did not accuse the misinformed as being false prophets/teachers, but rather he rebuked those who passed judgment on those who were mistaken. God can make one stand even with deformity in one's knowledge.

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[a] Or *"We all possess knowledge," as you say*

DIFFERENTIATION OF CONCEPTS

This in-depth study seeks to eliminate the confusion of certain terms that encourages and promotes division within the Churches of Christ as well as other religious fellowships. In not distinguishing between certain terms exercised by the Spirit, many Christians have brought about chaos in the ekklhsia of God and are hopelessly divided into numerous war-like camps. Part of the problem lies with the failure to differentiate adequately between terms employed by various branches within the Churches of Christ. For example, our delinquency in not differentiating between *unity* and *fellowship*, *unity* and *conformity*, *fellowship* and *agreement*, *Gospel* and *doctrine*, and *fellowship* and *endorsement* has contributed to a proliferation of sects within the Churches of Christ. And an inexact use of the above terms continues to uphold the orthodoxy of each divided circle. Thus, when we do not make proper applications of the various phrases employed among many Christians, then this lack of proper differentiation contributes to an abuse of the phrase "false prophets."

By distinguishing between specific key phrases adopted by many, this clarification of understanding will help to clear away the underbrush that prevents Christians from properly interpreting false prophets in the Book of Matthew. By eliminating certain presuppositions, we can approach the text without a lot of excess baggage. The following scenario is a brief analysis of the various clichés employed by many well-meaning Christians to uphold their brand of orthodoxy. This chapter seeks to awaken within every individual a correct understanding of the numerous rigid formulas in order to promote the unity for which Jesus prayed and to correctly identify the false prophets that He warned against.

Unity and Fellowship

Some leaders within the Churches of Christ do not make a distinction between *unity* and *fellowship*. According to some Christians, unity is founded upon fellowship of agreement, not unity created by the Holy Spirit. Many Christians advocate that the "unity of the Spirit" is as a result of fellowship with other believers in the same interpretative community,[605] but this philosophy is not biblical.[606] Unity is that which the Holy Spirit creates, not man. It is the Spirit's unity.[607] In fact, Paul writes, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace." (Ephesians 4:3). In other words, Paul says, "spare no effort." To what end? Not to produce a unity, not to create a unity, not to try to arrive at a unity, but to keep the unity. This unity is already in existence. It is unity of all those who believe and respond to the message of redemption expounded in Chapters 1-3 of Ephesians. In other words, fellowship is a fruit of unity, not unity a fruit of fellowship. Carl Ketcherside (1908-1989) is therefore right when he says,

> The Spirit introduces all of the obedient believers into one body and thus forms an active fellowship of all who respond to the Good News. He does this without regard for national or social distinctions. He generates a vital unity of all who are regenerated.[608]

Unity and Conformity

Again, we must differentiate between *unity* and *conformity*. Within the Christian community, we have sought to base a superstructure of religion upon attainment to a certain degree of knowledge and wisdom. The

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[605]Interpretative communities are composed of members who share a particular reading "strategy," or a "set of community assumption." See M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms,* 6th ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1993), 271. See also Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980). I have chosen to use "interpretative community" rather than "interpretive community" as employed by Fish.

[606]For a fuller explanation of these terms, see Dallas Burdette, "The 'Is' and 'Is Not' of Fellowship, *Restoration Review* 15, no. 10 (December 1973): 194-196.

[607]See Dallas Burdette (b. 1934), "The Spirit Makes Us One," *Restoration Review* 16, no. 4 (April 1974): 276-277.

[608]Carl Ketcherside, "The Spirit and Unity," *Mission Messenger* 25, no. 2 (July 1963): 3 [99]. To access all of the issues of *Mission Messenger* [On-Line], go to: www.unity-in-diversity.org

traditional concept of unity is based upon conformity in knowledge and wisdom.[609] But, it goes almost without saying that conformity in the absolute demands equal ability of perception, simultaneous arrival at perfection in knowledge, and universality of wisdom. Alexander Campbell (1788-1866) drove home this point extremely well when he penned:

> It is cruel to excommunicate a man because of the imbecility[610] of his intellect. I have been censured long and often for laying too much stress upon the assent of the understanding; but those who have most acrimoniously[611] censured me, have laid much more stress upon the assent of the mind than I have ever done. I never did, at any time exclude a man from the kingdom of God for a mere imbecility of intellect; or, in other words, because he could not assent to my opinions.[612]

The unity for which Jesus prayed is not external organizational unity. This unity is the unity of persons. It is a fellowship of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit with all those who believe. This means that the unity in the **ἐκκλησία** of God involves this fellowship of being. When one is born again, born of the Spirit, or becomes a partaker of the divine nature, this person shares in this unity for which Jesus prayed. God calls everyone into the fellowship of His saints through the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:13). There can be no unity at all in our Lord's sense apart from the operation of the Holy Spirit who creates within every believer this new nature. Paul wrote: "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink" (1 Corinthians 12:13). Jürgen Moltmann (b. 1926), German Protestant theologian, once said with his typical pungency:

> The unity of the congregation is a unity in freedom. It must not be confused with unanimity, let alone uniformity in perception, feeling or morals. No one must be regimented, or forced into conformity with conditions prevailing in the church. Everyone must be accepted with his gifts and tasks, his weaknesses and handicaps. This unity is an evangelical unity, not a legal one.[613]

Fellowship and Agreement

Another concept that divides many Christians within the Churches of Christ is that some do not make a separation between the terms *fellowship* and *agreement*. In many camps, if there is no agreement, then there is no fellowship. Many leaders and members throughout numerous Churches of Christ are now realizing that fellowship does not come as a result of our agreement upon matters of opinion and interpretation, but rather our ability to reach agreement upon doctrinal issues comes as a result of fellowship. We are not one in opinion; we are one in Christ. We do not become children of God through study, acquisition of knowledge, learning of the Law, or skill as teachers but through procreation—not through education. Ketcherside is quite correct in observing:

> As God accepted us in our weakness, with mistaken ideas, warped views and unhealthful attitudes, so we must accept each other in the same state or condition. We must not make the kingdom of heaven to consist of our convictions, attitudes or opinions, but of citizens who must be tolerant of each other in such matters, else there can be no kingdom of heaven at all.[614]

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[609]For an insightful article on unity, see Leroy Garrett, "Unity Is God's Gift," *Restoration Review* 15, no. 8 (October 1973): 150-152. See also Carl Ketcherside, "The Spirit and Unity," *Mission Messenger* 25, no. 7 (July 1963): 1-16.

[610]The quality or state of being imbecile or an imbecile.

[611]Caustic, biting in feeling, language, or manner.

[612]Alexander Campbell, "Millennium—No. II," *Millennial Harbinger* 1, no. 4 (Monday, April 5, 1830): 13, 14.

[613]Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991), 343.

[614]Carl Ketcherside, "Contrary to Doctrine," *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 3 (March 1965): 4.

Gospel and Doctrine

Next, we must discriminate between *Gospel* and *doctrine*, a separation drawn by the writers of the New Testament. There is as much difference between the Gospel of Christ and the apostolic doctrine as there is between the sperm from which a child is begotten and the food that he or she eats after birth. Paul knew the difference between the seed from which life came and the daily bread upon which the children fed. He knew the difference between Gospel and doctrine and between faith and knowledge. He knew that the Gospel brought one into being while the doctrine was essential to one's growth and wellbeing; Paul did not make a test of fellowship out of spiritual digestion.[615] Those who confuse chastisement of a child with begettal and cannot distinguish between correction and conception are in a sad predicament.[616]

Fellowship and Endorsement

Once more, we must distinguish between *fellowship* and *endorsement*, which is one of the major problems within the scores of Churches of Christ. Countless believers are under the impression that to have fellowship with one another is to endorse whatever the other person believes, which cannot be true. All Christians are in fellowship with God, but who is so foolish as to believe that God endorses everything a person believes or does? In Paul's letter to the Romans, he writes, "Accept him whose faith is weak, without passing judgment on disputable matters" (14:1). Again, "Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God" (15:7). But still, someone may ask, "Are you in fellowship with error?" No, one is in fellowship with individuals. The question posed by many is: "Are you in fellowship with brothers in error?" Our response must be "yes," because that is the only kind of brothers and sisters one knows about. As Alexander Campbell has made clear:

> So long as unity of opinion was regarded as a proper basis of religious union, so long have mankind been distracted by the multiplicity and variety of opinions. To establish what is called a system of orthodox opinions as the bond of union, was, in fact, offering a premium for new diversities in opinion, and for increasing, *ad infinitum*, opinions, sects, and divisions. . . . But the grandeur, sublimity, and beauty of the foundation of hope, and of ecclesiastical or social union, established by the author and founder of Christianity, consisted in this, that THE BELIEF OF ONE FACT, and that upon the best evidence in the world, is all that is requisite, as far as faith goes, to salvation. The belief of this ONE FACT, and submission to ONE INSTITUTION expressive of it, is all that is required of Heaven to admission into the church.[617]

CONCLUSION

The objective of this final chapter is to share with the leaders and members of the various fellowships within Christendom the true nature of unity. Also, this chapter is designed to assist individuals in learning how to determine who is or is not a false teacher so that unity in Jesus may be maintained. If we are going to advocate unity in Jesus, the unity for which our Lord prayed, we must understand certain key terms in order to determine the foundation of unity. Since all Christians are under a mandate to "Be imitators of God . . . and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (Ephesians 5:1-2), it is imperative that we work toward making "every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace" (4:3).

My hypothesis is that when we are taught how to differentiate between certain key phrases, we will arrive at a correct understanding and identification of who the false prophets/teachers are in the Book of Matthew and, thus, maintain the unity for which Jesus prayed. My emphasis in this examination of oneness

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[615]See Dallas Burdette, "Restoring the Biblical Ideal of Preaching" in *Restoration Forum VIII* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 1990), 147-155.

[616]See Carl Ketcherside, "Gospel and Doctrine," *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 2 (February 1965): 1-11. I am indebted to Ketcherside for assisting me in a clearer understanding of the distinction between Gospel and doctrine.

[617]Alexander Campbell, "The Foundation of Hope and of Christian Union," The *Christian Baptist* 1, no. 9 (April 5, 1824): 176, 177.

among God's people has called attention to the "unity of the Spirit" that we are to strive to uphold. Since we are to preserve this unity in all good conscious, a number of cliches were analyzed to help clear away the underbrush or cobwebs in our thinking so that we do not violate our beliefs. This study sought to assist individuals in eradicating fuzzy understanding in order to bring about an answer to Christ's priestly prayer for unity (John 17).

Also, this analysis of unity explored in this book (Old Texts through New Eyes: A Reexamination of Misunderstood Scriptures) demonstrates the utter impossibility of making absolute perfection in knowledge the condition of salvation and fellowship. Since lots of Christians advance the philosophy of unblemished perfection in knowledge of one's party beliefs before they can extend the right hand of fellowship, Paul was called upon to see if this viewpoint is what he taught before he extended friendly intercourse to other devoted saints. To refute faultlessness in knowledge as a prerequisite for association, this in-depth study looked at two congregations (Corinth and Rome) in which differences existed in order to determine from a biblical perspective the mindset to be exercised by us in similar circumstances today. In spite of disagreements within these two fellowships, Paul called for forbearance, not ostracism.

This book is <u>not</u> designed to question the sincerity of those who disagree with the findings set forth in these twenty-two chapters. This last chapter on the study of unity in Jesus is appropriate to conclude this book. The chapters presented in this book have sought to be true to the Word of God. The objective of these writings has been to encourage individuals to become *peacemakers*, not *piecemakers*. In other words, we are to promote peace and harmony, not to fracture the body of Christ into warring factions. Listen to the words of Jesus as He prays for unity among His people:

> My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, [21]that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. [22]I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: [23]I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. (John 17:20-23)

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